An Elusive Unity

Urban Democracy and Machine Politics in Industrializing America

James J. Connolly

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James J. Connolly

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For Sarah and Maggie

CONTENTS

Preface ix

Introduction: The Problem of Pluralism in Antebellum American Politics 1

1. Explaining Tweed: The Limits of Consensual Politics 28

2. Inventing the Machine: Liberal Reform and the Social Analysis of Urban Politics 54

3. Labor's Republic Lost: The Workingmen's Insurgency and Class Politics in the Gilded Age City 87

4. The Feminine Challenge: Clubwomen and Urban Politics 115

5. In Defense of Professional Politics 135

6. Progressivism and Pluralism 165

7. The Problem with the Public: Lincoln Steffens and Municipal Reform 189

Epilogue: *The Last Hurrah* and the Vindication of Machine Politics 217

Notes 225

Bibliography: Selected Primary Sources 253

Index 257

PREFACE

Aside from the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, few documents of the founding era carry more weight today than Federalist Number 10. James Madison's essay argued that the federal constitution would control "the violence of factions"—the sources of which he believed were "sown in the nature of man"—by encouraging a proliferation of interests in public life. Many modern observers read this proposition as evidence that pluralism was an inherent element of American democracy. But enthusiasm for the Tenth Federalist is a relatively recent phenomenon. Commentators all but ignored it through the nineteenth century. Only during the Progressive Era did Madison's argument emerge as a celebrated statement of the nation's political principles.[1]

The Tenth Federalist's century-long obscurity hints at the unease with which Americans embraced pluralism. Imagining public life as a fractious mix of contending groups and interests fit poorly with another American ideal, that of a single, morally cohesive public. James Morone called this civic impulse "the democratic wish": a persistent desire for "the direct participation of a united people pursuing a shared communal interest." Expressed in republican paeans to civic virtue through the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth century, the Populists' campaign for the plain people during the 1890s, and Progressive Era calls for devotion to the common good, this theme has consistently provided a counterweight to pluralism in American politics. Its enduring appeal meant that only with time, and in the face of substantial resistance, did the conception of public life as the process of brokering among competing interests earn grudging acceptance.[2] Even today it remains a controversial idea. Contemporary

complaints about special interests are just one indication of the continuing unease with which Americans view the frank pursuit of group agendas. Their persistence reminds us to heed Daniel Rodgers's warning not "to foreshorten the process by which the language of Madisonian pluralism elbowed out the language of the common good."[3]

Taking Rodgers's admonition seriously, this book explores the urban dimensions of this shift in American political thought and practice. It does so by tracing some of the varied, conflicting ways in which Americans designed and practiced city politics between the antebellum period and the Progressive Era. It was in large cities that class conflict, ethnic differences, religious disagreements, and other frictions were most intense.[4] The civic ideals that nineteenth-century Americans had inherited did not easily accommodate such complexity, heterogeneity, and conflict. Though celebrations of the pursuit of profit, and the differences it engendered, abounded, so too did an understanding of civic leadership and good citizenship as the selfless promotion of the common good. From the antebellum era onward, politicians and their critics argued with increasing passion about how public life in large cities should work, without ever resolving the issue. That argument was never fully settled.

This process has a significance that carries beyond the limits of its time and place. The refashioning of American democracy to fit the cosmopolitan city represented the first such attempt. Europe had large cities before the United States, but the Old World trailed the young North American nation's commitment to democratic politics. As England, France, and other nations expanded the franchise, they dispatched observers to the United States to understand both the process and its consequences. Even today the United States is regarded by many—not least its own leaders and citizens—as a beacon of democracy, an example of a nation that was able to make self-governance work in a heterogeneous society.

Such confidence, though not entirely misplaced, ignores the complex, difficult history of democratic pluralism in the United States, a history that this book explores. The opening chapters detail the problems Americans had in coming to grips with a contentious urban public life. The introduction examines the unsettling rise of frankly pluralistic practices and politicians before the Civil War and notes the persistent power of the ideal of a singular public. The first chapter analyzes the difficulties reformers had in explaining the extraordinary venality, dishonesty, and popularity of New York City's Tweed Ring in traditional republican terms. Chapter 2 considers the significance of the machine metaphor. It signaled the rise of a new social understanding of politics that located the roots of corruption not simply in the absence of civic virtue among party leaders but in the class and racial makeup of a heterogeneous urban order.

Movements that threatened to undermine party rule arose in cities during the late nineteenth century, placing urban bosses on the defensive. Chapters 3 and 4 recount two such challenges, each of which encouraged a more pluralistic politics, albeit in very different ways. The first came from a labor movement emboldened by the success of the Knights of Labor during the mid-1880s. The resulting political insurgency did not produce the workers' republic its advocates sought, but it cemented labor's role as an important interest in a plural society. The second came from clubwomen, whose approach to public life encouraged cooperation and dialogue among different social groups. Their methods embraced urban heterogeneity but undercut the notion that social differences produced irreconcilable conflicts that only men could handle. Chapter 5 details how party bosses responded to these challenges by sharpening their self-presentation as pragmatic, masculine leaders who could ensure stability in conflict-ridden cities.

The final two chapters examine the ways in which particular Progressive reformers strove to remake urban politics. Chapter 6 explores the ideas of a handful of activists who proposed alternative institutions and practices that promoted inclusion and deliberation in city politics. The seventh chapter dissects the ideas of prominent muckraking journalist Lincoln Steffens, whose inability to come to grips with a diverse urban order inadvertently helped steer Progressive Era municipal reformers toward the pragmatic, interest-group pluralism associated with machine politics. The book closes with political pluralism ascendant in both thought and practice, though its many inadequacies still prompted doubts about its legitimacy in a democratic order.

A specific understanding of the term *democracy* provides the foundation for the arguments advanced in this book. As Sean Wilentz has noted, "democracy is a troublesome word." It can be defined as majority rule, as the expansion of voting rights, or more loosely as a general leveling of social distinctions. Taking its cue from recent theorizing, this book employs a more exacting standard. It demands not only the formal trappings of democracy—such as competitive elections and a broad distribution of the franchise—but several other characteristics that might best be described as participatory, reciprocal, and deliberative. Democracy in this sense requires a socially inclusive process of debate, a sense of respect for those taking opposing positions, and a willingness to settle questions on the basis of rational argumentation rather than the status of participants. It demands of citizens the "deep" pluralism described by William Connolly which expects them to take seriously and remain open to the perspectives and values of those with whom they differ.[5]

Under these criteria, democracy remained elusive in urban America. Wilentz rightly notes that the ability of the people—or at least of ordinary white men—to rule expanded dramatically during the first half of the nineteenth century. The rise of mass parties, which marked the acceptance of the principle of legitimate opposition, also introduced pluralistic practices into American politics, practices that enabled some outsiders to challenge those in power. Yet as any historian would acknowledge, these developments left room for improvement. Not only did they exclude women and blacks; they also did not produce deliberative institutions and processes in which the quality or persuasiveness of arguments consistently outweighed the social rank of the person making them. In other words, the distribution of power remained unequal, with some groups better able to articulate and pursue their interests than others. Allocating authority in a perfectly equitable fashion is perhaps a hopelessly utopian endeavor, but such a rigorous definition provides a useful measuring stick against which to gauge American efforts to reconcile democracy and diversity.

There is also a regional dimension to the argument advanced here. As the title indicates, the book focuses on industrializing America. In this instance the phrase means the Northeast and Midwest, a region marked off roughly by the Ohio River and the Mason-Dixon Line in the south and the Mississippi River to the west. It was within those boundaries that industrialization, urbanization, and immigration developed most intensively between the antebellum period and World War I. And it was within the cities of that region that Americans first confronted questions about how democracy would be made to work in a modern, disaggregated social environment. The economic and social evolution of other regions limited urban growth and helped give those sections distinctly different political characteristics. The few western and southern cities that grew large before 1900 featured many of the same characteristics as the industrial cities of the North; those that urbanized later developed different political orders.[6]

Even within these confines, certain cities received more notice. New York attracted the most attention during the nineteenth century, when it was not only the nation's largest city but also the center of its economic and cultural life. Most of the key publications, especially nationally circulated magazines such as *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper,* emanated from New York. That made local politics and politicians the subject of nationwide discussion. Tammany Hall received extensive coverage and came to exemplify big-city organizational politics. Its leaders—William Tweed, John Kelly, and Richard Croker—were household names and easily recognized from the many sketches and political cartoons that circulated in these publications. Moreover, it was in polyglot New York that questions of democracy and pluralism began working themselves out first and most intensely, warranting special consideration of that

community. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, a rapidly growing Chicago drew increasing interest. A more socially open city, due to the absence of an well-established elite, it produced thinkers and reformers with especially creative ideas about how democracy should work in the city, most notably settlement worker Jane Addams. She became the nation's leading interpreter of urban social and civic life during the 1890s, elevating Chicago's importance to the national conversation about city politics. At particular moments, Philadelphia, Boston, Detroit, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Milwaukee, and even smaller places such as Rochester, New York, introduced important people, ideas, and practices into the debate over the proper character of city politics.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the many institutions and people whose advice, support, and patience allowed me to complete this book. Ball State University provided leave, financial support, and a congenial atmosphere in which to work. Several units on campus were especially helpful: the History Department, the Center for Middletown Studies, University Libraries, Archives and Special Collections, the Interlibrary Loan Office, the College of Sciences and Humanities, and the Sponsored Programs Office. Elsewhere I relied on the staffs of the Boston Public Library, Massachusetts Historical Society, Harvard University's Widener and Houghton libraries, the New York Public Library, Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Chicago History Museum, and the Library of Congress. The Gilder Lehrman Institute, the National Endowment for the Humanities, Ball State, and the Massachusetts Historical Society provided essential funding for research. Some sections of this book appeared in the *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, in *Mid-America*, and in *Boston Histories: Essays in Honor of Thomas H. O'Connor*, ed. James O'Toole and David Quigley (Northeastern University Press, 2004). My thanks go to the editors, publishers, and staff involved in all these publications for their feedback and help.

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The three people closest to me deserve the most thanks. Beth Hawke has shared all aspects of my life, including parenthood and moves to unexpected places, for more than twenty years. It hasn't always been easy, so I am deeply grateful for her love and commitment. Sarah and Maggie have grown up with this book, which is one reason why it has taken so long to complete. But if they have slowed down my writing, they have enriched my life immeasurably. For that reason, this book is dedicated to them.

AN ELUSIVE UNITY

INTRODUCTION

The Problem of Pluralism in Antebellum American Politics

Among the popular political songs circulating during the 1850s was Tom Robinson's "Paddy's Fight with the Know Nothings." Sung to the tune of a popular air (either "Rory O'More" or "The Campbells Are Coming"), it told of a clash between "Paddy" and a gang of Irishmen arrayed on one side and a knot of Know Nothings on the other. In the song Paddy described the fight to "Bridget," presumably his wife, after returning home with a black eye and bloodied nose. In his Irish accent he set the scene:

> Our party was thirty, all armed wid' big sticks,
> Sure we'd knock 'em about like a thousand bricks;
> At the villains we went, we "brave men of the hod,"
> An' I gav' a big "Yankee" a belt with the gob.

Paddy and his colleagues, "wid sprigs of shelalah," fought bravely, but the "hard-fisted Yankees" forced them to "ratrate." In the end, he reported, the "bloody 'Knownothings' have carried the day." Thoroughly routed, Paddy added a final observation: "Now I tell you one thing and that you may note—I'll keep far away from the place where they vote."[1]

"Paddy's Fight with the Know Nothings" reflects the sharp sense of cultural conflict that pervaded cities during the middle years of the nineteenth century. Paddy and Bridget were self-evidently Irish; Paddy's rivals were "Yankees" and "Know Nothings," a popular reference to the nativist American Party. The reference to "men of the hod" added a class dimension to the Irish gang, marking them as hod carriers, among the least skilled jobs in the developing industrial

FIGURE 1. A sketch of a saloon and voting site in New York City's Sixth Ward, 1858. Such settings served as stages for the rough, masculine, openly ethnic and plebeian political style that developed in the poorer quarters of antebellum cities. This new approach to politics, with its overt acknowledgment of group differences, raised alarm among respectable observers. *Harper's Weekly,* November 13, 1858.

order. The emphasis on violence and the fact that Paddy was reporting back to a concerned Bridget at home underscored the masculine nature of the clash. For many, city politics during the 1850s was just as Tom Robinson depicted it: a masculine realm in which members of rival class and ethnic groups battled—often violently—for political supremacy.

But "Paddy's Fight with the Know Nothings" was not a vindication of pluralistic politics; it was an affirmation of American Party assumptions. In celebrating the masculine vigor of Yankee men and denigrating Paddy and his fellows, it portrayed Irish immigrants as ill-suited for American citizenship. The lesson Paddy learns—not to interfere at polling places—underscores the Know Nothing claim that working-class Irish were a threat to republican government. A key goal of the party was to prevent the Irish and other newcomers from participating in civic life, by using violence if necessary, until they were thoroughly Americanized. What the American Party ultimately sought, and Tom Robinson's song presumed, was moral consensus in politics. Know Nothings argued that American democracy could not function properly unless all citizens shared a common moral and political outlook, one they believed was entirely foreign to the Irish.

With its celebration of violence, its employment of crude stereotypes, and its implicit message, "Paddy's Fight" reminds us of the fierce debate about political pluralism in antebellum urban America. Evidence of social heterogeneity was impossible to ignore amid the tensions and conflicts arising in urban settings during the half century that preceded the Civil War. Immigration fueled cultural clashes; industrialization disrupted a civic and social order built on categories of merchant and mechanic, master and apprentice; cities developed social geographies that accentuated group differences. A politics to match this fragmented order arose in lower-class city neighborhoods, featuring plebeian leaders who acknowledged frankly that they served group interests, not the common good. But such an approach to public life remained highly suspect outside those settings. The idea that politics could function in the absence of moral consensus was far from an established principle. Politicians seeking support from a wider constituency dared not assert that it could work without caveats or covering rhetoric. The many third-party and reform movements that arose between the 1820s and 1860, most claiming to represent the people as a whole, reflected the prevailing suspicion of political pluralism. The onset of the Civil War only fueled demands for unity, making it harder to justify the group-oriented party politics practiced in industrial cities.

Although the United States was by no stretch an urban nation before the Civil War, the decades that preceded that conflict featured dramatic urbanization. Any hope that the nation would remain exclusively agrarian had long disappeared by 1860. Between 1790 and 1830 New York expanded from 33,000 people to 215,000; by 1860 its population had surpassed 800,000. Other northern cities grew quickly as well, though none quite so dramatically. Neighboring Brooklyn transformed from a town of just more than 15,000 in 1830 to a city of 267,000 in 1860. Philadelphia would jump from 161,000 in 1830 to 566,000 in 1860. Boston went from 61,000 to 178,000 in the same period. Chicago, little more than a camp in 1830, had more than 109,000 inhabitants on the eve of the Civil War.[2]

With numerical increase came social and cultural heterogeneity. The early stages of American industrialization fed class formation and class tensions, as "mechanics' interests" developed into workingmen's parties and early trade unions by the 1830s. Labor strikes became a common feature of urban life. Those conflicts were quickly overlaid with ethnic differences as immigration accelerated dramatically after 1840. Sean Wilentz's description of New York captured the character of that city's metamorphosis between the 1830s and the 1850s: "New York changed from a major seaport where the vast majority of citizens were native born to a metropolis where more than half of the population had

been born abroad and where more than four fifths of the immigrants had come from either Ireland or Germany." Though on a different scale, other coastal cities underwent a similar transformation in the decades leading up to the Civil War. By the 1850s more than half of Boston's population and close to a third of Philadelphia's were foreign born. Smaller cities such as Buffalo also experienced a refashioning of their social orders so that urban life in the northern United States became markedly plural by the time of the Civil War.[3]

Consciousness of urban diversity manifested itself in many ways. As early as 1815, New York, Boston, and Philadelphia had commonly recognized social geographies that included slum districts. By midcentury, neighborhoods such as Five Points in New York City, the North End in Boston, and Moyamensing in Philadelphia had developed into districts with distinctive ethnic and class characteristics, underscoring the absence of a shared culture and identity among urban populations. Street gangs and volunteer fire companies reinforced the melding of class, ethnic, and neighborhood identities. Riots generated by racial and sectarian animosity were almost routine events in Five Points and Moyamensing, as were clashes connected to political competitions.[4]

Commentary on cities also stressed this heterogeneity. Edgar Allen Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" described the diversity of the urban masses: "innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance." Writing of the "humanity of the city," Edwin Hubbell Chapin stressed that the "first lesson of the street" was the "diversity of human conditions." During the 1840s Walt Whitman wrote ecstatically of New York City as a "teeming nation of nations." More acerbically, diarist George Templeton Strong reported on a Manhattan railroad car ride that brought him into contact with a panoply of urban types: "stale sickly odors from sweaty Irishmen in their shirt sleeves, German Jew shop-boys in white coats, pink faces, and waistcoats…fat old women with dirty nosed babies [and] one sporting man with black whiskers."[5]

Politicians seeking support capitalized on the social tensions evident in Strong's comments. The transition from shop to factory prompted antebellum workers to begin thinking of themselves as a distinctive class with particular interests. Clashes with nativists over public schooling, Sabbatarianism, and temperance encouraged Irish and German immigrants to imagine themselves as cultural groups with special concerns and demands as well as specific enemies. The growth of these mentalities was in large part a political process. As workers or immigrants became aware of their common interests, party politicians rushed to meet them with targeted policies and symbolic gestures. Such efforts in turn helped mobilize these constituencies and reinforce their nascent collective identities. Class, ethnicity, and religion often overlapped and intertwined in complicated ways, but in the decades preceding the Civil War it is difficult to imagine

any northern city dweller entering the political arena without being conscious of his or her group membership.

Many of the historians who have surveyed public life in this era see the emergence of a fully formed political pluralism. By 1840, Richard Hofstadter, Joel Silbey, and others have argued, the Whig Party joined the Democrats in fully embracing mass politics and the concept of legitimate opposition. They have pointed in particular to the ideas and practices of Martin Van Buren, who developed a coherent rationale for parties that stressed their function as aggregators of interests and brakes on social and regional conflict. These scholars insist that pluralism now reigned as the operating principle of American public life. Party leaders reached out to specific economic and social groups, offering them recognition and public policies that served their interests. In the process, they not only helped politicize collective identities but established a political ethic that emphasized service to particular interests rather than to the public good. Silbey detected "a deeper appreciation and a fuller, more comprehensive acceptance of pluralism" among American politicians by the 1840s. These "pluralists," he added, "accepted that no policy was clearly reasonable to everyone—that there is no single right answer, only preferred directions."[6]

In their rush to establish the pluralist character of early mass democracy in America, these historians overlooked evidence of persistent antipartyism. Discussing the Whig Party after 1838, Silbey argued that its leaders joined the Democrats in a full embrace of organized mass politics. Focusing on action rather than talk, he dismisses antipartyism as mere rhetoric, insignificant compared with the actions of party leaders. "For every Whig who lambasted party 'intrigue' and spirit," he wrote, "there were many others who practiced the first and spoke in favor of the second." It is worth considering why these politicians talked differently than they acted. Antipartyism remained powerful, at least as rhetoric, because Americans were not yet fully comfortable with the idea of politics as organized competition among divergent interests. The ideal of consensus remained attractive to many Americans, in part because of the fears prompted by immigration and class conflict. The challenge for party politicians, as Gerald Leonard has explained, was to sell "the idea of party organization and party authority to an antiparty electorate."[7]

As a result, party politicians were on the defensive to a greater degree than some scholars have acknowledged, even after 1840. They had to mobilize voters, often by appealing to their distinctive and varied economic and cultural interests, at the same time maintaining that they were selflessly devoted to a unitary public good. Whigs managed to reconcile these conflicting agendas more easily than their Democratic counterparts because their ideology of economic development and moral reform appeared to serve only the public weal, even if

party leaders did not hesitate to appeal to particular interests. Their eventual successors, Republicans, initially conceived of themselves as an antipartisan organization, devoted to the common good, rather than as a coalition of interests. For urban Democrats, who sought the support of the working class and immigrants, the balancing of pluralist politics and professions of concern for the whole community was trickier. They managed in part by defining themselves as "the Democracy," a term that designated the antithesis of Aristocracy and made Democrats the true voice of the people. Such a formulation echoed republicanism's image of a united people standing in opposition to privilege even as it fit comfortably with appeals to an emergent working class.[8]

The need Whigs and Democrats felt to cast themselves in consensual terms reflects a persistent unease with pluralistic politics. The notion of a unified public retained a powerful appeal that made it difficult for a politician to cater openly to particular interests during the antebellum decades, and few office seekers dared reject notions of consensual politics openly. That did not mean that the practice of city politics proceeded from assumptions of unity, but party leaders could not yet afford to admit routinely that notions of civic harmony fit poorly with the circumstances of urban life. An inherited faith in a monolithic people remained too powerful a current in American civic culture for so bold a step.

A key reason for such hesitancy was the enduring power of republicanism. In broad strokes, republicanism was the preference for a system of elected representation over monarchy, a system derived from classical precedents and an ideal that helped spur the American Revolution. History conveyed the fragility of such arrangements. Few peoples managed to maintain the consistently good character necessary to choose wise and moral leaders, making the risk that a republic would slide inevitably toward a concentration of power in monarchical and aristocratic forms. For that reason, republicanism placed great emphasis on civic virtue. It also stressed the acceptance of natural leaders, gentlemen whose self-evidently good character suited them to republican leadership. Personal conduct and frugal living distinguished such men. A lust for power, the desire for social distinction, and a fondness for luxury threatened to undercut civic virtue, leading to the rise of corrupt rulers and the downfall of the republic. All these principles rested on the assumption of a moral consensus about the proper standard of civic conduct among both citizens and leaders.[9]

An alternative civic formulation eclipsed republicanism after the nation's founding. Liberalism posited a social order of autonomous individuals pursuing their own self-interest rather than a self-abnegating citizenry defined by civic virtue. Competition among them, and among groups of people who banded together to pursue shared desires, would generate the most efficient, productive society possible. The role of politics and government was limited to ensuring

that the competition between interests proceeded in a fair manner. Liberalism's emphasis on self-interest promoted the risk taking and profit seeking that drove urbanization. It also provided the framework for justifying professional politics as the art of brokering among competing groups. Liberal precepts predominated, but they commingled with republican concepts (and Christian principles) to shape public life in the new nation and its cities.[10] This mix of concerns for unity with individualism and self-interest proved volatile. It generated a longstanding argument over the shape of politics that ran from the nation's founding and through the early decades of the nineteenth century. The degree to which different interests and groups ought to be accommodated in the political process underlay sharp disputes over matters such as the size of election districts, economic development policies, and the nature of political leadership. The debate was particularly intense and enduring in cities, where the most extreme forms of self-interest and pluralism were on display.[11]

Within that argument, republicanism provided a language for criticizing the new style of politics. As the well-to-do ceded civic authority to professional (and often plebeian) politicians, critics (including many of the displaced gentlemen) charged that the new leaders lacked civic virtue. Such claims presumed the existence of a unitary common good, a concept possible only if all citizens operated from a shared moral code. Republicanism's opposition to faction—self-interested pursuit of political power by small bands of manipulative politicians—fed the antipartyism that was woven into antebellum and Civil War–era political culture and placed politicians on the defensive. More a vocabulary than a coherent ideology, republicanism proved flexible enough and durable enough to supply a framework that reformers and dissenters could use to organize insurgencies and that even mainstream party politicians could employ to define their activities as morally legitimate.[12]

Amid the ideological welter of antebellum urban public life, a new political style took shape, though it could hardly be termed triumphant. Responding to the urban environment's rich stew of class and ethnic grievances, big-city politicians quickly mastered the art of appealing to working-class and ethnic interests. The most significant of this new breed was New York City mayor Fernando Wood, whom historians often identify as the first citywide political boss. Such a label exaggerates his power. It also obscures the degree to which he and his contemporaries had to balance their frank acknowledgment of group interests with expressions of fealty to an undifferentiated public good. Leaders whose reach extended no further than the ward could afford to be open about their methods, but those with wider ambitions had to be more circumspect. In every setting the idea of a politics responsive to the needs, values, and interests of different groups met with

resistance, as an inherited belief in consensual politics and respectable leadership remained salient and kept urban partisans on the defensive.

The urban elite did not retreat from politics so much as withdraw from the grass roots. The republican idea that gentlemen of social standing should assume the lead in civic life remained evident through the early decades of the nineteenth century. As late as the 1830s, upper-class men in New York and other cities could be found leading neighborhood charity drives, at the head of fire companies, and leading ward-level political organizations. Some could even be found at the front of election-day mobs. But the sharpening of class boundaries, both social and spatial, severed such ties. Upper- and middle-class men remained involved in city politics, supplying financial support for party operations, providing connections to the national organization, and serving as standard-bearers for congressional seats and the mayoralty. Men such as Philadelphia's "Gentleman Democrat" Richard Vaux, Boston's Josiah Quincy, and New York's Samuel Tilden and William Havermeyer remained prominent political figures even as men of lesser social standing began to emerge as leaders in the working-class sections of the city.[13]

In less well heeled sections of the city, politics was no longer the province of gentlemen commanding deference. Men such as Isaiah Rynders and Constantine Donoho dominated the rough-and-tumble political life of New York's notorious Five Points slum. Rynders, a "sporting man" and gang leader with "a strong love of the card-room and the race-track," established the Empire Club in 1844 to help mobilize Democratic voters. Exploiting his close ties to the subterranean world of prizefighting and his own reputation as a knife fighter, Rynders used violence and intimidation to carry elections and earn himself a place of prominence in the Democratic Party. His chief rival was the "hard fisted" saloon keeper Constantine J. "Con" Donoho, who used his position as street inspector to dole out patronage and earn a loyal following.[14]

Men with similar profiles began to emerge in the working-class neighborhoods of other cities, although the pace of this stylistic shift varied from city to city. In Philadelphia the second-generation Irish immigrant and saloon keeper William McMullen emerged as the dominant force in the Moyamensing district. Pittsburgh's Joseph Barlow, a ferocious nativist and street gang leader, managed to win election as mayor in 1850. In Boston, politicians emanating from the ranks of the city's burgeoning Irish proletariat would not gain power or prominence until after the Civil War, and even then they were slower to abandon claims to middle-class respectability than were their counterparts in other cities.[15]

The approach to politics adopted by these men had a distinctive class character. As Amy Bridges and Sean Wilentz have noted, New York Democratic leaders developed personae that echoed the methods of such early labor politicians as

Mike Walsh. An Irish-born engraver-turned-journalist, Walsh drew on a political style that had originated with the mechanics' movement of the early nineteenth century. A fierce critic of capitalists and speculators, he was an aggressive advocate for workers' interests who cast himself as the antithesis of a gentleman politician. In 1840 he formed the Spartan Association, a combination workingman's club, gang, and political organization, and used it to force his way onto the Tammany Hall ticket. Though a labor activist first and a politician second, Walsh was in many respects a prototype for politicians such as Rynders, Donoho, and McMullen, who borrowed this style as a means of implicitly signaling their social allegiance.[16]

The development of the term "boss" as a label for this new breed of politicians points to the working-class roots of their political style. Derived from the Dutch word *baas,* which meant "master," the word grew popular after 1815, as early industrialization began to undermine the master-journeyman relationship. It was used initially to signify a small-scale master who employed wage workers rather than training apprentices. A mix of republican and racial anxieties helped popularize this usage: "boss" provided an alternative to "master," a term that white workers feared would imply a lack of independence and make them indistinguishable from black slaves. By the 1840s it was common to describe as bosses men who were themselves trained in a specific skill and who employed wage laborers in that trade. Thus in 1847, when New York's *Champion of American Labor* announced a meeting, the scheduled participants included a "boss painter," a "boss blacksmith," and a "boss mason."[17]

The word's political connotations arose as these men formed alliances with local parties and supplied them with patronage. Perhaps the first such use occurred in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. The masters running the various trades operating there were called bosses, and they regularly hired workers on the basis of their political ties. By 1849 correspondents to the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* could speak comfortably of a meeting of the "whig bosses" at the Navy Yard, and the paper could joke about the necessity of making a political pledge in order to get a job there. During the Civil War "Boss Laborer" Alonzo Gale sparked controversy when he reputedly denied a returning veteran who had lost an arm a job at the Naval Yard solely because he was a Democrat. An aspiring politician, Gale earned the nickname "Boss Gale," which he carried into public life. Another local "boss," Hugh McLaughlin, used his position as a leading dispenser of Navy Yard patronage during the late 1850s to gain control of the Brooklyn Democratic Party organization. The political use of the word appears to have been a local phenomenon through the Civil War period. Not until another local boss, William Tweed, earned national attention during the 1870s would the term become widely used outside Brooklyn and New York City.[18]

Boss politics was fiercely masculine as well. While electoral politics had always been a male sphere, it was characterized by an emphasis on gentlemanly decorum. In the ferocious world of antebellum city politics, winning elections was often more about intimidation than either rational persuasion or social standing. A capacity for violence became a prerequisite for success. Militias, street gangs, and volunteer fire companies were deployed as foot soldiers in the pitched battles that constituted a notable part of antebellum city politics. The men who led these institutions of male sociability often emerged as the leaders of party politics in city neighborhoods, marking local public life with a distinctive brand of working-class manliness.

Women had no formal role in politics at the urban grass roots. That does not mean they were uninvolved in the public life of these communities. Some participated in street demonstrations, although usually on the margins rather than the front lines. The wife of local boss Con Donoho, a saloon keeper and grocer in New York's Sixth Ward, often helped her husband by attending to customers in the grocery. As one neighbor recalled, "should Mrs. Conlan or Mrs. Mulrooney, or the wife of any other good voter of the old Sixth come [in]…she would avail herself of the opportunity to have a bit of a talk with her concerning how her James, Patrick, or Peter would vote on the approaching aldermanic election." But such activity was largely hidden from view, and ground-level politics in cities remained fundamentally a rough-and-tumble male realm.[19]

The sharpened gender distinctions that characterized ground-level public life in big cities were an indication of how far this politics had strayed from republican conventions. Republicanism had always been ambiguous about women's roles. On the whole it was a patriarchal formula that reserved full citizenship for male heads of households. But its emphasis on virtue created openings for women to assert themselves on the basis of their purity. Commingling with separate spheres ideology and evangelical prescriptions, republicanism charged the mother with the responsibility of imparting moral and civic values to her children. That duty fell to her because, unlike her husband, she was untainted by participation in public life. Some women carried that role further, claiming a responsibility for promoting morality beyond the home. They took leading roles in the temperance and abolition movements, moral causes that allowed them to act in public without violating gender boundaries. The presence of women provided these public campaigns with a veneer of disinterestedness, an impression that the cause was morally principled rather than self-serving.[20]

Politicians, at least those seeking the support of middle-class constituencies, were aware of the still-tenuous status of mass parties and drew on this formula to deny that their new organizations were simply self-serving factions. They used women in ceremonial roles that signified their organizations' devotion to moral

principles (a conceit that had the added benefit of implying that the opposition was immoral). By the 1840s the Whig Party in particular gave women prominent places in galleries and parades. Such displays took advantage of the ambiguity surrounding women in public during this era, which permitted them to appear in public as signifiers of purity but generally restricted their participation to such symbolic roles. Their presence also ensured an event's decorum, a necessity as politicians strove to maintain a veneer of respectability and the legitimacy that followed from it. Democrats were slower and more reluctant to engage in such theatrics, in part because they did not share the enthusiasm for moral improvement and piety that characterized the Whigs. But both parties used this tactic to defend against charges that they lacked the principles and restraint that characterized legitimate republican leadership. In contrast, the absence of women from formal public proceedings in urban neighborhoods and the unruliness that accompanied such activities underscored the masculine, conflict-driven character of ground-level city politics.[21]

Such contentiousness can be glimpsed in the rise of William McMullen to political prominence in Philadelphia. Born in 1824, the son of an Irish immigrant dockworker, McMullen was as far removed from respectability as one could imagine. A reputation as a fierce and effective street fighter earned him the nickname "Bull" as a youth and won him a position of leadership in a local gang in Moyamensing, a heavily Irish and thoroughly poor section of the city. He joined the Moyamensing Hose, the local fire company, and became involved with the Democratic Party in his early twenties. In both roles he frequently took part in brawls. He enlisted in the army during the Mexican War in order to avoid charges of stabbing one police officer and attacking another. During his service he befriended members of the Killers, a notorious Philadelphia street gang, who made up the core of his company. His unit was cited for "the extremest of bravery" during the U.S. assault on Mexico City. McMullen's war record, his capacity for aggression, and his ties to rougher elements would all prove useful in the violent, highly masculine world of Moyamensing politics, and he quickly rose to prominence on his return from Mexico.[22]

McMullen the politician operated much as McMullen the street fighter had. After opening a saloon in 1854, he used his support among local fire company members and gangs—the membership of the two overlapped considerably—to win a seat on the Board of Aldermen in 1857, and he would remain in public office for most of the remainder of the century. As an elected official, he was a fierce protector of neighborhood interests and used violent and illegal means when necessary. In 1860 city officials accused him of causing a riot, and he was charged with intimidating a voter the following year. A decade later he was at the forefront of one of the worst episodes of racial violence in the city's history,

perhaps even orchestrating the riots that prevented blacks from voting and killed three men. When city officials proposed turning Moyamensing Hall, the neighborhood's chief civic building, into a cholera hospital in 1866, local residents balked. They claimed that their district was being turned into a dumping ground for those with the highly contagious disease and threatened to burn the hospital down before it opened. When their protests went unheeded and the city began stocking the hospital, they followed through on their threats with McMullen's blessing. He led his fire company to the scene, where it monopolized nearby hydrants to prevent other fire companies from attacking the blaze but refused to put the fire out itself.[23]

This style of politics reflected a distinctive political mentality. McMullen's operating principle was the defense of communal interests. Moyamensing had a specific identity that blended Irish Catholic and working-class loyalties. Writing of Philadelphia but offering an observation that could be applied to many urban enclaves, Dennis Clark has noted that immigrant neighborhoods such as Moyamensing developed a "minority culture," a group consciousness rooted in a sharp sense of difference and exclusion. The role of political leaders was to serve those concrete interests rather than some abstract notion of the public good. That could mean cheating to win elections, permitting or promoting riots when necessary, and using other violent methods. McMullen's participation in these activities won him praise from his neighbors. He came to be known as the "Squire" of Moyamensing, a nickname derived from rural Ireland, where it signified wisdom and communal authority. It is worth noting that McMullen had the backing of local Catholic priests, at least one of whom actively supported him. Clergy were arbiters of respectability and legitimacy in these communities, and their advocacy bolstered the distinctive political ethos that politicians such as McMullen embodied.[24]

If the politics practiced by McMullen and his peers earned them an unyielding loyalty in their neighborhood, it raised concern beyond it. Politicians seeking citywide offices still had to contend with assumptions about the nature of politics and the character of politicians which did not fit comfortably with the ethos developing in working-class immigrant neighborhoods. As men without gentlemen's credentials began to venture beyond their neighborhoods, assuming seats on Boards of Aldermen and even in Congress, and as some of the practices of mass politics grew more brazenly corrupt, criticism intensified. Negotiating these competing civic visions was the challenge that the most ambitious urban politicians faced in the years leading up to the Civil War.

Fernando Wood, mayor of New York in the 1850s and 1860s, was the politician who perhaps most successfully navigated the contradictory currents of antebellum city politics. Often labeled the first big-city boss, Wood not only

practiced the group-oriented politics that arose in the antebellum period but was among the first to articulate an affirmative defense of such practices. He argued that notions of the common good were antiquated and that pursuit of a politics based on such a concept was impractical. What cities needed were strong, pragmatic, and experienced politicians who would preserve order in an increasingly heterogeneous and contentious society. This formulation would endure as the key element in the rationale for urban machine politics into the twentieth century. But Wood was savvy enough to recognize that such pronunciations had to be leavened with nods to republican notions of civic leadership devoted to the public good rather than private interest. Even in a decade of ferocious social and political tensions, the idea of politics as a means of managing group conflict and preserving social peace was too unsettling to express in undiluted form.

Wood's life equipped him to understand the social tensions of antebellum urban America. A poor boy who rose to prominence in both business and politics, he had a foot on both sides of the class divide. Wood was born in Philadelphia in 1812 and moved to New York with his father in 1820. His early adulthood was marked by failure, both in marriage—his first ended in divorce—and in business. He attempted to establish a grocery and grog shop, but it went under in 1838. A second marriage to a woman from a wealthy family permitted him to invest in real estate, and his fortunes improved. But his business dealings were marked by controversy, and charges of fraud would dog him as he rose to prominence politically, contributing to his reputation as an unprincipled politician.[25]

Despite these controversies, the ambitious Wood craved the respectability and prestige that came with business and civic success. Unlike his ward-based contemporaries, he did not adopt the style of the common man. His campaign biographies remembered his father as a respected businessman rather than the impoverished laborer that he was. Wood joined the Episcopal Church and placed his children in private schools. By all accounts he conducted himself formally and took great care to dress fashionably. Yet even as he erased his lower-class background, as a politician Wood displayed a marked sympathy for the poor that seemed to reflect his origins.[26]

Wood's political career began during the 1830s when he became involved in local Democratic Party activities. He joined the Tammany Hall organization in 1836. When Tammany split with other Democrats over the question of a national bank, Wood sided with the more radical Locofoco wing of the party. (The name came from a brand of matches used at one of the group's meetings to light the room after Tammany Hall rivals cut off the gaslights in an attempt to break up the meeting.) Sympathy for the workingman and a producerist republicanism that marked the early labor movement would remain a staple of Wood's politics. He earned a seat in Congress in 1840, despite controversy about his

business ethics. He lost reelection and remained out of office until his successful bid for mayor in 1854, by which time memories of his earlier misdeeds had faded and he had persuaded local reformers seeking a cleaner, more economical city administration to support him. He was reelected in 1856 but lost a third bid the following year when controversy over policing and questionable patronage decisions alienated both reformers and Tammany leaders. He then formed a new organization, Mozart Hall, and regained the mayor's office from 1860 to 1862. (He is perhaps best remembered for proposing during the Civil War that New York secede and maintain its independence from both North and South.) Wood earned another term in Congress in 1863, where he expressed sympathy for the South and became a leader of the Peace Democrats. For this sympathy, he was labeled a traitor by Republicans, and his lukewarm support of the Union cause damaged his political reputation and cost him reelection. He returned to Congress again in 1867 and served until his death in 1881.[27]

Wood was an especially aggressive practitioner of interest group politics, often in a manner that reinforced his reputation for dishonesty. Although ostensibly pro-temperance, he was known to drink a lager with German voters. Running for Congress in 1840, he employed Anglophobic rhetoric to win Irish votes and cast himself as a friend of the Irish. Once in Congress he campaigned for the release of Irish political prisoners in England. As mayor he also backed calls for the creation of a ward-based common school system, which permitted Irish Catholics to manage the schools in their neighborhood without Protestant interference. Yet Wood was also secretly a member of the Know Nothings at least briefly, apparently in an effort to win nativist support. Although Wood was hardly the first politician to play both sides of a question, he did so with notable brazenness.[28]

A frankness about class divisions and the potential for conflict pervaded Wood's politics as well. In his first inaugural address he urged the city's middle classes to "remember the poor" and not to be "ungrateful as well as inhuman." Employing producerist logic, he warned, "Do not let it be said that labor, which produces everything, gets nothing, and dies of hunger in our midst, whilst capital, gets everything and pampers luxury and plenty." When the Panic of 1857 struck and unemployment in the city jumped sharply, Wood proposed massive public works projects as a means of relieving "the inevitable distress of the working classes," a move that angered leaders of the city's nascent municipal reform movement. He even suggested paying workers with food. When critics charged that Wood was engaging in a form of demagoguery that unjustifiably pitted class against class, local workingmen's groups strongly backed Wood's program and accused his opponents of engaging in class warfare.[29]

Wood's capacity to appeal to a wide range of interests received musical expression during his first term. In the "Song for Mayor Wood," published in 1855,

he is portrayed as a beneficent leader doling out benefits and solving the varied social problems of his many constituencies. The first verse captured the scene, with Wood receiving supplicants in his office, as he often did:

> Mayor sits in his chair of state
> While an eager throng about him wait,
> Young and old, wealthy and poor,
> Pressing at the open door;
> Ev'ry seeker of gain or good
> Comes with his troubles to Mayor Wood.

The song went on to record the assistance Wood provided to an angry homeowner complaining about ashes dumped on the street in front of his house, a woman deserted by her husband, a rube from the countryside conned by a slick city operator (the mayor arranged for him to recover his stolen watch), and unpaid seamstresses. The final verse depicts Wood hearing the complaints of Germans denied the opportunity to drink on Sunday. In the song he insists on enforcing the Sunday closing law, which will bring an end to their "riotous drinking," a position designed to win him the support of temperance voters.[30]

The "Song for Mayor Wood" appears to have been based on the mayor's daily practice of entertaining petitions from constituents. In a ritual that would become part of the urban politician's stock in trade, a line of supplicants would form outside his office each morning. They would enter Wood's office one by one, and he would listen to their complaints and issue orders designed to remedy their problems. The process focused on the predicament of individuals caught up in the complexities and conflicts of city life. In doing so, it underscored Wood's self-depiction as a powerful leader managing the conflicts and tensions that pervaded urban society.

A published account of one such session early in Wood's mayoralty illustrated this pragmatic approach to politics. It first appeared in the *New York Courier and Enquirer* in February 1855, just over a month after he had taken office, and was republished in Xavier Donald MacLeod's 1856 campaign document, the *Biography of Hon. Fernando Wood, Mayor of the City of New York.* The article recounted "all that occurred" in exchanges with a variety of visitors, beginning early in the morning and continuing until two o'clock in the afternoon. It stressed the diversity of the "motley crowd" seeking an audience with Wood, one that represented "in almost every grade, the varied population of the city." Petitioners included an Irish junk shop dealer ("one of the unwashed"), a "middle aged gentleman" complaining about a public house that served as headquarters for a gang of thieves, a plainly dressed immigrant who explained in accented English that he was unable to pay the rent, a German woman seeking the release of her husband from

prison, and a respectable woman who had been defrauded of an early version of a machine gun inherited from her father. Interspersed were visits from public officials to report problems requiring the mayor's attention or to receive orders on how to deal with a particular issue.[31]

One purpose of the article was to reassure increasingly anxious property holders. Under Wood's vigorous leadership, neither working-class agitation nor massive immigration would disrupt the smooth functioning of the city. Perhaps designed to allay fears generated by Wood's expressions of support for workers in his first inaugural address, the article portrayed Wood as a firm, masculine leader with an intimate knowledge of the city. He would keep the working classes in line, protect the rights of property holders, and manage the immigrant masses pouring into the city.

A related theme—the capacity of the mayor to keep order efficiently amid this diversity and conflict—was developed in the article as well. Even as the reporter set the scene, this point was evident. The policemen and clerks attending to the mayor were "all very orderly and noiseless in their movements, but brisk and prompt." If such hints were insufficient, he went on to declare that the "spirit…of orderly and noiseless energy in the outer room" indicated "a ruling spirit of the same character beyond in the inner chamber." Wood made decisions in a brisk manner, interrupting petitioners and issuing orders to policemen and clerical staff standing by. It was evident from these commands that he possessed a thorough knowledge of the city. The mayor began the session by ordering the chief of police to remove officers from private details to ensure that there were sufficient men patrolling the wards, a step that no doubt placated those most anxious about urban disorder.

Subsequent decisions also assured readers that the mayor would maintain peace and order in the city and sustain the rights of property. Wood summarily revoked the operating license of the Irish junk dealer, who stood accused of dealing in stolen goods. He dispatched a policeman to investigate a complaint about a pawnbroker (who reportedly ran a respectable shop) and to settle the matter if possible. When an out-of-town auctioneer sought advice about how to operate in the city, Wood's simple advice was, "Go by the law, my friend." The poor ethnic worker who could not pay the rent found no help from the mayor, who refused to prevent the impending eviction. No doubt mindful of the political support he sought from temperance advocates, Wood ordered the controversial public house closed after receiving a report from a policeman on its character. He also briefly conferred with the chief of police to arrange the arrest of two prizefighters and to prevent a boxing match, an illegal and disreputable form of urban entertainment that was popular among the working class. Finally, on hearing about the theft of the widow's machine gun, the mayor acted promptly.

Noting the special danger of such a weapon in the hands of thieves, he ordered their immediate arrest.

Vigorous action also highlighted his masculinity, a characteristic that went hand in hand with his capacity to maintain order. Though he was slight of build, Wood nevertheless had features that were "strongly marked, particularly about the mouth, on the compressed lips of which great firmness is legibly written." In his dealings with petitioners and subordinates, Wood was invariably forceful, decisively issuing emphatic, plainspoken orders. Treating females with paternalistic authority, he also made it clear that the management of these sorts of matters was a man's realm. When the woman who had lost the inherited machine gun to thieves began to speak, Wood interrupted her. Speaking "pleasantly," he suggested that the gentleman who accompanied her tell the story because "you ladies, in such matters, are apt to go a good way around before you get to the point." Such pointed emphasis on the masculine character of Wood's work underscored the necessity of strong, no-nonsense leadership to manage urban society.

What was implicit in the account of Wood's methods was explicit in a statement of his distinctively urban approach to politics and government elsewhere in MacLeod's book. In words that Wood himself would soon echo, MacLeod articulated a surprisingly frank pluralistic political philosophy. He began by noting the "infinitely various character, language, and ideas" of the nearly three-quarters of a million inhabitants of New York City. Original New Yorkers of Dutch and English descent were "almost extinct," overwhelmed by migrants from other states and especially from Europe. "And all these have different ideas of government, of the meaning of the word 'liberty'; have different rules of action, different manners of thinking, different habits of life," he added. They also had "national and natural antipathies for each other." The challenge facing politicians was "how to govern so huge, so densely packed a mass; how to unite or least keep harmonious, so many, so powerful discordant elements; how to reconcile their antipathies, subdue their jealousies; how to manage the newly-landed hordes of poor; how to please all, or at least keep all quiet."[32]

The consequence of this heterogeneity was the abandonment of the ideal of consensus. Emphasizing the absence of monolithic opinion, MacLeod wrote that in cities, which contain "such a diversity of thought, language, rule of action, habit of judgement, predisposition, and effect of education," there was "no such thing as *one* public mind." And "where there is not *one,* a *single* public mind it is almost impossible that the decrees or wishes of the government can be generally understood or made acceptable." Part of the problem was a lack of awareness of the condition and character of all those living in so diverse and anonymous a setting. "Our citizens," MacLeod explained, "are satisfied with a general knowledge

of what the nation is doing and wanting, without troubling their heads about what is going on next door."[33]

In the face of the difficulties inherent in governing so large a city, the only solution was greater power for the mayor. To rule so complex a community, the local government required "power commensurate with its necessities." In what would prove to be the most controversial aspect of this approach, MacLeod—and by extension Wood—sought to increase the power of the mayor to govern an "odd, wild metropolis." New Yorkers' inability to understand "the precise condition of the populace here" prevented them from recognizing and accepting the need for greater power invested in the mayor. In making this argument, Wood was partly seeking to overcome limits on municipal authority established by the state legislature, which prevented him from financing many projects (and thus distributing patronage), and partly attempting to overcome popular resistance to increasing his power.[34]

There is little question that MacLeod was expressing Wood's ideas in what would now be called an authorized biography. Wood himself used virtually identical language in a campaign speech in 1859. In fact, the variations are so minimal that it seems possible that they are the result of transcription errors alone. Making these claims in the wake of the panic of 1857 and the demands for unemployment relief it prompted gave added punch to Wood's acknowledgment of heterogeneity and social conflict as well as to his call for greater centralization of power. Whether the words were originally written by MacLeod or by Wood, it is clear that the sentiments they conveyed were Wood's.[35]

Wood presented his approach to urban politics as a defense of capitalism. Strong leadership that protected private property and ensured order was necessary for business to function and the city to prosper, he argued. As a supporter explained while defending the mayor's aggressive leadership, "the insecurity of life and property, the enormous expense without advantage, will drive commerce to other ports." And when Wood proposed unemployment relief, he was offering an implicit warning that if the distress of the working classes was not relieved, the city might face sharper class conflict. This theme, which pervaded both Wood's pronouncements and those made on his behalf, would come to characterize the defense of urban machine politics during the second half of the nineteenth century.[36]

Implicit as well in these contentions was the rejection of civic virtue. The scale, complexity, and heterogeneity of cities meant that civic action undertaken on behalf of the common good lacked credibility. Only individual and group interests were possible in such a context. The sensible course was to cede the management of the city to a strong leader who could balance competing interests and ensure the order necessary for residents to conduct their private affairs

profitably. Good citizenship in such a context required little more than orderly behavior and private initiative.

Such an argument represented perhaps the first extensive expression of a distinctly urban political philosophy in the United States. It drew on the liberal claim that the common good was the result of competition among private interests and fitted it to big-city circumstances. Numerous urban politicians had long employed methods that corresponded to this vision of urban civic life, but nobody as prominent as Wood had spelled it out to such an extent. Wood's arguments would become commonplace, though never uncontested, in the years following the Civil War, but his clear articulation of them before 1860 was an incendiary challenge to the traditional ideal of civic unity.

That provocation would not go unanswered. When Wood proclaimed the necessity of strong leadership in a heterogeneous city, he received sharp criticism. The *New York Times* attacked him in anti-aristocratic terms, labeling him "our little Caesar," a would-be "municipal emperor" and "monomaniac" who sought to be "lord and master of our city." Wood, the paper declared, believed himself "the only man in New York who can save us from anarchy," a dangerous vision that would permit the city's residents to ignore their duties as citizens to participate in the government of the city. The *Times* and other critics constantly attacked Wood as a self-serving schemer, a charge for which Wood himself supplied substantial ammunition. The republican themes that informed anti-Wood rhetoric would reemerge in criticism of later urban bosses.[37]

These attacks put Wood on the defensive. Although Wood's supporters were quite frank about the pluralistic nature of urban civic life and the need for centralized power, they also paid lip service to traditional conventions, honoring republican ideals of consensus and civic virtue even as they articulated a concept of politics at odds with those ideals. A sympathetic biographer noted that New York had "the most heterogeneous population that ever was compacted together as a city in a civilized country," but he also wrote of a singular "people," promising that Wood could be relied on "to carry out the people's will and protect the people's interests." MacLeod's account of a day in the mayor's office, though it emphasized the diversity of the city, also contained brief nods to republican themes. The depiction of Wood doling out favors and solving problems echoed the largesse of the gentleman leaders of an earlier day, though Wood used city authority and money rather than social prestige and personal wealth to do so. As the reporter set the scene, he noted not only Wood's personal characteristics and his petitioners' social character but also the setting itself. He stressed its plainness, a reminder that although Wood was a strong leader, he displayed no aristocratic airs. "No grandeur meets the eye" as one entered the office, the author declares, "nothing but two rooms, plain in architecture." Wood sat on a

"plain oak chair"—nothing that evoked a throne—in front of "an equally plain mahogany counting-house table." The simplicity of the setting itself reminded readers that his authority did not derive from wealth or social standing.[38]

Wood himself used communal rhetoric when politically useful. It is not difficult to find references to a singular "public good" or the "people in their sovereign capacity" in his public utterances, even when he stressed the diversity of the city in the same speech. After the state legislature undercut his power with a new city charter and the formation of a metropolitan police force independent of city control, he cast himself as the defender of the city's "sovereign people" against the tyranny of the legislature, which had placed the city in a "feeble state of vassalage" without "any voice in the selection of our masters." Such language clearly aimed to evoke the American Revolution and its anti-aristocratic and antimonarchical themes.[39]

That Wood would have to pay heed to such conventions even as he articulated a new urban pluralism suggests how strong the ideal of a consensual civic life remained. Republicanism continued to supply not only a vocabulary for criticizing party politicians and politics but also a framework for conceiving alternatives. Two such approaches predominated: third-party activism rooted in antipartyism, and nonpartisan reform movements, a new phenomenon that would become a common feature of the urban political landscape over the next century and the antithesis of the style of politics adopted by Wood and his successors. Third parties and nonpartisan movements had much in common and often overlapped and intersected, with "reformers" at times defining themselves as third parties. Both pointed to spoils politics and the unprincipled, disreputable character of party leadership as key symptoms of the problem, and both offered a consensual alternative that denied the validity of pluralist politics.

The new forms of politics produced familiar criticism. Surveying the Buffalo press during the 1850s, David Gerber found a portrait of partisan-driven public life that included "little more than endless plotting by partisan wirepullers, spineless conformity by placemen, and pervasive corruption," with much of the blame placed on immigrants. Similar portrayals developed in other industrial cities of the Northeast and Midwest. The operations of the major parties, or at least the perceptions generated by criticism of them, fueled demand for a nonpartisan politics rooted in a set of social and political values and devoted to a single common good.[40]

One manifestation of an enduring desire for consensual politics was the abundance of third-party movements that arose during the antebellum period. An extensive array of third parties developed at all levels of the polity during the nineteenth century. Among the earliest in cities were the Workingmen's Parties

that formed in New York and Philadelphia at the end of the 1820s and, despite their names, claimed to speak for the true people against privileged interests. During that decade the Middling Interest—or the "General Interest"—Party first formed in Boston. In ensuing years third parties became a routine presence on city ballots, offering voters alternatives to the major parties. The most common name was the People's Party. Organizations using that name sprouted in Providence as early as the 1830s and in New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and numerous other cities by the 1850s. The most successful third-party movement was the American (or "Know Nothing") Party, which would achieve electoral triumphs in several northern cities, including Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago, during the mid-1850s.[41]

While most third parties expressed the agendas of particular groups, they did not describe themselves in that way. The American Party articulated the desires of a particular segment of the population, as did most of the People's Parties that arose in antebellum cities. Yet neither their names nor their rhetoric admitted as much. They also denied that they were parties in the conventional sense. The declaration of a New York Know Nothing summed up the view of most third parties: "Party action has . . . lost all dignity above that of a mere struggle for the power of dispensing patronage." Unlike the self-serving, scheming politicians who ran the major parties and cared more for patronage and other partisan concerns than for the common good, third parties invariably cast themselves as pursuers of the public interest. They prominently eschewed spoils politics (or claimed to) and depicted themselves as virtuous citizens battling corrupt interests.[42]

The Know Nothings, or American Party, offered a highly visible illustration of this phenomenon. Originating in New York City in 1853 out of a network of secret and semi-secret nativist societies, it spread rapidly to other cities as native-born Americans flocked to newly created Know Nothing lodges during the spring of 1854. With an agenda that included support for municipal reform and opposition to slavery (at least among northern Know Nothings) as well as hostility to immigrants, the party gained a substantial following in the urban North during the mid-1850s. It elected mayors in Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia during the mid-1850s and gained substantial support in New York, Buffalo, and other cities. But the party's decline proved almost as rapid as its ascent. Unable to resolve differences over slavery, the party disintegrated after the 1856 presidential election.[43]

Although the party clearly served as a vehicle for a specific segment of urban society—native-born Americans made anxious by mass immigration—it did not define itself in group terms. It was the "American Party," the voice of a traditionally homogeneous society under siege by outsiders. Its goal was to "clos[e] the fatal chasm in our social system" that split native-born and newcomer. Know

Nothing literature even denied that class mattered, insisting that "even in the lower class of native-born citizens, there is a great amount of virtue and intelligence." Among immigrants, however, that virtue and intelligence were lacking. They were "the scum of European society, ejected by its rotten institutions, or cast up by the surges of revolution," and made incapable of republican citizenship by a lack of moral education. Know Nothings did not reject entirely the possibility that immigrants could eventually be made into Americans, but they insisted that the process was a long one. Their signature proposal was a twenty-one-year waiting period for newcomers seeking citizenship. Over that time it was possible for immigrants to acquire "our innate love of Liberty, our intense hatred of aristocratic and monarchical institutions, our untiring activity, and the practical talent we possess." But until they developed the political and moral outlook that would make them part of "our type of civilization," it was necessary to exclude them from citizenship.[44]

Antipartyism served the Know Nothings' purpose perfectly. It permitted them to act as a group but to portray themselves as representatives of a homogeneous people. Party leaders employed the antiparty formula to paint themselves as representatives of the entire community and to define any opposition as insidious outsiders. Thus, criticism of wire pulling, ballot box stuffing, bribery, illegitimate use of patronage, and other forms of political corruption were almost as common in Know Nothing rhetoric as expressions of hostility toward immigrants. These two complaints complemented each other as well, permitting the party to blame immigrants for the malfeasance increasingly evident in city politics. The result was a portrait of politics in which only one organization served a legitimate purpose and any opposition was by definition a corrupt and illegitimate faction.

A second, even more explicitly urban alternative to party politics arose in antebellum cities during the 1850s. Municipal reformers were somewhat more prepared than Know Nothings to accept urban heterogeneity, but only in a fashion that diminished the salience of social differences. These activists presented their movements as coalitions of native and immigrant, landlord and rent payer, employer and employee, but insisted that a common fund of civic values subsumed such differences. Denying the political relevance of these dividing lines, reformers argued that good citizens of all backgrounds shared a desire for frugal government, low taxes, and honest politics.

Organizations styling themselves municipal reform groups or nonpartisan citizens' movements began to arise in cities during the 1850s. Although at times they mingled with or overlapped third parties, they often dispensed with the trappings of partisanship altogether, choosing instead to define themselves as extrapartisan voluntary groups. They represented the first manifestations of

what would become a common element of American city politics during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They were specifically urban, designed in opposition to the highly partisan, patronage-oriented, and plebeian style of party politics that developed in cities during the 1840s and 1850s. Examples included the City Reform League in New York, Pittsburgh's "Independent Citizens" tickets, a nonpartisan movement for commission government in Cincinnati, Boston's "Committee of Sixty," and a nonpartisan "People's" ticket in Buffalo.[45]

Not surprisingly, New York City developed one of the fullest municipal reform movements during this period. The plebeian political style had taken shape more quickly and extensively in the city, sparking sharp expressions of concern. In 1852 a group of the city's "most influential citizens" organized the City Reform League. Declaring themselves alarmed by the character of city leaders, who appeared to be engaged in "robbery," the founders of this group dedicated themselves to replacing the "worst men" who now governed New York with "men of character." At a "City Reform" meeting the following year, activists broadened their agenda to include the pursuit of a new city charter that encompassed a variety of structural reforms to city government designed to induce "integrity and economy in public affairs." And in 1854 reformers nominated an independent ticket for city offices, making a point in the process to contrast their methods with those of parties. "We will commence this evening the work of reform," they resolved, "by naming in open meeting, and without the intervention of Party wirepullers, an independent, capable, honest, and energetic citizen, uncommitted to any political interest or faction, as the People's candidate for Mayor." The movement split when partisan differences proved insurmountable and when reform-sponsored candidates proved just as prone to raising taxes and cutting political deals as their partisan counterparts. But the reform style would become a recurrent feature of city politics in New York and elsewhere.[46]

New York's municipal reformers employed a formula that depicted a united people challenging corrupt, self-serving rulers to frame their enterprise. Peter Cooper, a prominent civic and business leader who presided over the March 1853 meeting that formulated a demand for a new city charter, opened his remarks by declaring that there was "a despotism in our midst" and urged "we, the people" to choose men qualified to perform the duties required "to secure the substantial interests of our City." Declaring the city "fearfully misgoverned and despoiled," the sympathetic *New York Tribune* argued that "corruption has been growing worse and worse for years." The paper chastised the city's "comfortable citizens" for a lack of civic virtue. They were content to pursue their private interests while leaving government in the hands of scheming, disreputable party politicians with no concern for the public good.[47]

Association with the Know Nothings as well as the class standing and class-inflected rhetoric of reform leaders made this approach difficult to sustain. There was considerable overlap between the Know Nothing Party and leadership in the reform movement in New York City, an affiliation that marked reform as the province of a particular cultural group. The social makeup of the movement was also evident. A survey found their ranks dominated by members of the city's economic elite. If such a profile was not enough, the movement's rhetoric reminded voters of its social character. "The result of civic apathy among the respectable classes," the pro-reform *Tribune* declared, was that city offices were filled by "contract jobbers, office seekers, grog-shop keepers and hireling rowdies." In a discussion of the prospects for a new city charter, the paper noted that "so long as Bruiser Dodson, Mose Fogson, and Jake Worthless [earned] $50 to $500 each by 'putting through' this or that charter ticket in your ward, while you are busy in your stores, your offices, your banks, &c, you will have corrupt, bad, rapacious rulers." Such language clearly aimed to mobilize the middle class, whose lack of civic virtue had handed over city government to disreputable men.[48]

Evidently aware of the political challenges associated with this class position, reformers claimed that they spoke for the entire city. Insisting, as one speaker at the 1853 charter meeting did, that the reform movement included "people of all shades of party, of all complexions in religion, and of every station in life" suggested a defensiveness against charges of elitism. Commenting on the meeting, the *Tribune* declared that it was "not a gathering of two or three particular interests…but a blending of all professions and pursuits, showing that no part of the people are indifferent to the subject of municipal reform." High taxation, they insisted, was an issue that mattered not only to property holders but also to rent payers, who felt its effects when landlords passed on additional costs to their tenants. The *Tribune* also noted instances of working-class participation, such as the decision of two hundred employees in the shipyard of reform leader William Webb to attend the charter meeting. Citing "heavy and unjust taxation" as well as infringements on "the rights of laboring men," the workers agreed to attend the meeting en masse. No mention was made of the influence their employer likely had over their decision.[49]

Assertions that the campaign for municipal reform was a multiclass movement acknowledged social differences but diminished their significance. Reformers claimed that a harmony of interests existed, not that they spoke for a monolithic public. In that limited, subtle sense they accommodated urban diversity by defining themselves as a coalition. But their inability to go further, to imagine that the civic interests and priorities of rich and poor or of different religious or ethnic groups were not inherently compatible or to recognize that such groups brought different moral sensibilities to public life, limited reform's

appeal. That failure would continue to characterize municipal reform activism into the Gilded Age, reflecting the ongoing problem of defining a pluralistic approach to urban politics in nineteenth-century America.

On the eve of the Civil War, Americans still had not come to grips with the political implications of urban diversity. The politics practiced by party politicians in poor urban neighborhoods was predicated on the claim that social differences mattered politically. But that concept of civic life was extraordinarily controversial and engendered sharp opposition. When Fernando Wood articulated a pragmatic political ethos that rejected the ideal of the common good and called for powerful centralized leadership to manage urban heterogeneity, he earned sharp criticism. Indeed, few antebellum politicians had blacker reputations than Wood. Groups seeking the redress of particular economic and cultural grievances ignored by Whigs and Democrats did not—or could not—act as particular interests. Instead, they drew on republican rhetoric to cast themselves as the true "people" doing battle with selfish interests and scheming politicians. Municipal reformers, too, sought to define themselves as representatives of a unified community. Although they acknowledged the diversity of city life, they tried to erase it by insisting on a fundamental unity that eclipsed social and economic differences. That rhetorical strategy proved even less workable than the one used by Wood and his fellow partisans.

The Civil War experience did little to resolve the problem of defining a democratic politics in the urban North. Though ill-suited to cities, the ideal of a singular public intensified during the battle for the Union. As numerous scholars have noted, parties not only survived the upheavals of the war but remained the chief basis for organizing the electorate and driving policy. Yet there can be little doubt that antiparty feeling intensified in northern cities, fueled by fervent wartime patriotism. At least for a time it muted the pluralistic approach inherent in urban partisanship and fostered a consensual approach to politics.[50]

Both parties attempted to define themselves as the only legitimate political entity. Republicans, now dominant in most parts of the North, wasted few opportunities to present Democrats as disloyal and their party as no more than a tool of slaveholders and their greedy northern allies. Democrats, though poorly positioned to make such claims, nevertheless condemned Republicans for their "dynastic and despotic attentions." Francis Leiber's popular pamphlet, *No Party Now but All for Our Country,* circulated widely and reflected the political sentiments of many, if not most, northerners.[51]

To at least some extent the impulse for antipartisanship penetrated to the urban grass roots. The majority of cities saw the formation of "Union" parties that united Republicans and pro-war Democrats and denied the possibility of

legitimate opposition. Commenting on the city's 1861 City Council elections, the *Philadelphia North American* reported that a "large proportion of republicans wish to unite with other parties in the election of a Union candidate, sinking all party distinctions." When local Republicans ignored that advice and instead nominated a staunch partisan in one district, he lost by a substantial vote. A local pamphlet published the same year captured the mood on the ground in northern cities. The author, who identified himself as a Douglas Democrat, titled it *Unionists versus Traitors: The Political Parties of Philadelphia; or the Nominees That Ought to Be Elected in 1861.* On this issue as on so many, Fernando Wood proved a reliable weathervane. Though a staunch Democrat who had earlier floated the possibility of New York City seceding from the Union and who would later call for peace without the capitulation of the South, he quickly announced his support for the Union cause at a pro-war meeting and insisted that "we know no party now."[52]

The formation of Union Leagues in the largest northern cities helped to breathe new life into the idea of a united public. Spearheaded by local elites in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, these organizations sought to return upper-class men to positions of civic leadership in unified communities. They challenged the partisan culture that had elevated working-class men to positions of power, and drawing on wartime zeal for patriotism, they aimed to restore an urban civic model predicated on deference and unity. Their chief tool was print, and Union Leagues in each city spun off publication societies that generated scores of pamphlets and broadsides aiming to rally popular support for the Union and for their leadership. The goal, as Boston's John Murray Forbes put it, was to "enlighten the working classes" in the expectation that a newly unified citizenry would eschew corrupt party politicians and turn to patrician figures for leadership and guidance.[53]

Such claims of political unity were particularly ill-suited to heterogeneous cities. Although in some ways the war encouraged consensus and provided an opportunity for groups such as the Irish to demonstrate their loyalty, it did not erase politically salient differences. Draft riots in Boston and New York illuminated the "multiplicity of grievances" at work in cities which no rhetoric of unity could obscure.[54] The escalation of antipartyism and consensual political rhetoric provided little opportunity for the expression of collective complaints or pursuit of particular interests within the framework of electoral politics. While not every city experienced the same degree of violence and upheaval, the Civil War stymied the development of a frankly pluralistic politics suited to an increasingly cosmopolitan urban society.

Despite the poor fit between republican-inspired visions of civic life and the heterogeneity of the city, hopes for a consensual urban politics endured into the

late nineteenth century. The patriotic fervor of the Civil War era revivified the concept of a united community. The men who led Union Leagues quickly transferred their efforts to municipal reform in the postwar years. That vision would shape the response to New York City's Tweed Ring scandal, which sparked the first national conversation about the problems of urban public life.

1

EXPLAINING TWEED

The Limits of Consensual Politics

William Magear Tweed of New York City was perhaps the most corrupt politician in American history. He was the leader of Tammany Hall, the dominant faction of the local Democratic Party, and thus the de facto head of city government from 1866 to 1871. He used his time in power to enrich himself enormously. By one estimate he and his confederates—the "Tweed Ring"—stole $6,312,541.37 (roughly $1 billion in early twenty-first-century terms) during 1870 alone. The New York County Courthouse, built under Tweed's watch, was supposed to cost $250,000. Kickbacks and inside deals boosted its cost to more than $13 million, including more than $2.8 million for plastering and another $1.5 million for the plumber, yet it was never completed. The 1871 *New York Times* investigation that exposed the Ring not only led to its rapid downfall but established Tweed as the archetypal crooked boss, a reference point in the annals of American political corruption.[1]

As outrageous as Tweed's actions were, his fellow New Yorkers did not quite know what to make of him or how to respond to his depredations. The most common reaction was to explain his inordinate behavior in republican terms—as an example of the dangers of faction—and to act accordingly. But that course of action assumed that New Yorkers were united in opposition to Tweed and Tammany. The city was too divided for such an assumption to hold, as Tweed's reelection to the state senate that fall made that clear, and a handful of reformers offered an alternative explanation: Tweed and his fellow conspirators were an outgrowth of new conditions that produced a complex, fragmented social and political order. Reform in that context could not begin with the assumption that

FIGURE 2. Thomas Nast's famous image of the Tammany Tiger mauling the Republic, with members of the Tweed Ring looking on from the emperor's box. Nast depicted William Tweed and his allies, who dominated New York City politics after the Civil War, as a rapacious faction destroying republican virtue (symbolized here in feminine terms). Nast and other Ring opponents imagined themselves expressing the shared outrage of a united people, a formula that did not fit polyglot New York. *Harper's Weekly,* November 11, 1871.

all or even most New Yorkers shared a common set of civic values. Yet even the authors of this analysis were not yet ready to abandon the republican ideal of a unified citizenry led by virtuous leaders. Instead, working through the Tilden Commission, a body formed to revise municipal government in the wake of the Tweed scandal, they sought to reconstitute the community by limiting voting rights on fiscal matters to property holders. Their expectation was that the bourgeoisie, at least, comprised a morally cohesive public.

Even this exclusive vision of republican unity proved unsustainable. A resurgent Tammany and an outraged labor movement mobilized against the proposal to restrict suffrage, and it was defeated. The rise of this opposition, along with the efforts of New York's comfortable classes in support of the plan, laid bare the city's social divisions. Although the rhetoric of unity would not fade entirely, it would lose much of its credibility in the wake of the Tweed scandal and its aftermath. The most sophisticated reformers recognized this reality, abandoned ready-made appeals to a united citizenry, and began to think of the community in heterogeneous terms.

This rethinking of municipal reform had national implications because the Tweed scandal was more than a New York story. Newspapers around the country carried excerpts or commentary on the *Times*'s revelations and closely followed events in New York during the summer and fall of 1871. Thomas Nast, an influential cartoonist for *Harper's Weekly,* eviscerated Tweed with his art, making him the embodiment of corruption and one of the most recognized figures in the United States. Other national publications, including *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper,* the *Nation,* and the *North American Review,* offered extensive commentary on the scandal and its aftermath. The Ring was a heavily discussed issue during the 1872 and 1876 national elections, particularly the latter after the Democrats nominated New Yorker and erstwhile Tammany ally Samuel Tilden. Discussions of the origins and character of the Ring, as well as the appropriate way to respond to it, resonated all the more because they fit with a growing national concern over apparently endemic political corruption at all levels. As *Leslie's* noted, Tweed's New York was "but a miniature picture of what administration, Municipal, State and National, has become, and only attracted more general attention because it is so central a point."[2]

The Tweed Ring's resonance stemmed in large part from its connection to the partisan political culture that had developed in industrializing cities during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Tweed and his three main confederates had climbed up the ranks of the Democratic Party during the 1850s. The corpulent Tweed—his bulk was a political asset in the street clashes common to his early career but would eventually become fodder for caricaturists—had abandoned business for politics at a young age. He used his role at the head of the Big Six Fire Company to propel himself into office, first as an alderman and then in the U.S. Congress for a term. In 1857 he assumed a place on the New York City Board of Supervisors, a lucrative and powerful position that helped make him a Grand Sachem of the Tammany Society by 1863. Richard "Slippery Dick" Connolly was the Irish-born leader of the Tammany organization in the Twenty-first Ward whose strong following among his fellow immigrants helped him rise through party ranks until Tweed made him the city comptroller in 1868. Peter Barr Sweeny, "Brains," the son of Irish saloon keepers, entered politics through his work as a volunteer fireman and saloon keeper in the Sixth Ward. He became a lawyer and was named to the Tammany General Committee in 1852. After his uncle was elected to the state senate in 1854, he set up shop in Albany, where he earned a reputation as an effective backroom dealer. He allied himself with Tweed and assumed the position of city chamberlain in 1866. Abraham Oakey Hall was a college-educated lawyer with a penchant for ostentatious dress and behavior. Nicknamed "Elegant Oakey," he joined the Tammany organization in

1864 and soon emerged as the front man for the Ring and its link to the city's business community. He was elected district attorney in 1866 and became mayor in 1868, lending the Ring an air of respectability.[3]

Although they were rivals of Fernando Wood, Tweed and his associates followed the former mayor's methods in many respects. They too positioned themselves as brokers in a complex, socially divided metropolis. Experts at appealing to working-class immigrants through patronage, symbolic gestures, and direct aid to the poor, the Ring's leaders also earned the support of a large slice of the city's business community through an aggressive program of local development and a promise to keep the lower classes in check. This last assurance was particularly effective at a moment when the memory of the New York City draft riots was still fresh. As Seymour Mandelbaum explained, in a city with "a host of contesting claims, values, and hopes, Tweed had resolved [the] debate by paying rival interests in their own coin—social welfare in one pocket, roads in another, cash in still a third (including their own)."[4]

Members of the Ring saw themselves as professional politicians and expected to be compensated for the services they provided. The possibility of profiting handsomely through municipal politics had greatly expanded by the 1860s. The development of American railroads spawned the first large-scale contractors, which soon enlarged their field of operations to include to urban public works. City governments began to give out substantial contracts for the construction of schools, streets, and water and sewer systems. These contracts became key sources of patronage as well as lucrative opportunities for businessmen, many of whom established close ties to politicians and readily paid kickbacks to obtain municipal projects. While hardly the first to exploit this arrangement, Tweed and his colleagues did so on a previously unimaginable scale.[5]

Profiting from the municipal funding process in this manner proved difficult to sustain. City governments also borrowed the financing mechanisms developed for railroad construction, using bonds to fund their construction program. Substantial and unsettling increases in municipal debt followed, and criticism of the Ring mounted in 1869 and 1870, as the city's financial obligations rose dramatically and the Ring's frantic efforts to hide them began to unravel. One signal of the Ring's difficulties was the ongoing, apparently unending, construction of the County Courthouse in lower Manhattan.

Wealthy New Yorkers who tolerated the Ring because it was good for business grew uneasy when faced with these and other excesses. They particularly feared tax increases as municipal debts soared. They also recoiled from the increasingly extravagant behavior of Tweed and his colleagues. Several members of the Ring purchased ostentatious houses and established the luxurious Americus Club near Greenwich, Connecticut. Tweed staged an opulent wedding for his daughter

in May 1871, an occasion that spurred a great deal of comment and not a little ridicule. Perhaps most damaging to the Ring, though, was the eruption of ethnic violence surrounding a July 1871 parade held by the Loyal Order of Orange to commemorate the Battle of the Boyne, a Protestant victory over Irish Catholics in 1690. When the city government failed either to block the parade or to contain Irish Catholic anger, a riot erupted, leaving more than sixty dead and one hundred wounded. The violence shook the faith of the local elite in the Ring's ability to maintain social order, and support among the city's business classes, already weakening, plummeted.[6]

The final blow to the Ring came in the weeks following the Orange Riot. Armed with revelations from a disaffected confederate, the *New York Times* published a series of account ledgers and investigative reports that documented a portion of the massive fraud perpetrated by Tweed and his allies. The revelations spurred the creation of a citizen's committee in September 1871 which led a campaign to remove the Ring from power. Bolstered by Nast's compelling cartoons in *Harper's* and editorial support from newspapers in the city and around the nation, opponents of the Ring succeeded in routing it during the fall elections, although Tweed held on to a seat in the state senate. Six years of investigations, trials, and jail sentences followed, along with Tweed's sensational escape from prison (and equally stirring recapture en route to Spain) before the scandal ran its course.[7]

The dominant explanation of the Ring's rise and fall was a familiar one. Coverage in the press drew on traditional republican themes, depicting a case of individual malfeasance in which a small faction seized power and exploited it for personal gain at the expense of the community. Shared moral outrage united the opposition to the Ring, rendering social and cultural differences insignificant. In this formulation, nearly all citizens of New York, whether wage worker or capitalist, immigrant or native, Catholic or Protestant, merchant or manufacturer, arose as one, tied together by a common moral code that defined their views of the matter. Like the municipal reformers of the 1850s, most anti-Tweed agitators acknowledged the heterogeneity of the city but denied that it mattered when fundamental civic values were concerned.

One indication of how contemporaries understood Tweed and his allies is the use of the word "ring" to describe them. The term first gained currency during the mid-1860s and remained a common part of the political vernacular throughout Reconstruction. Every political scandal seemed to have a ring behind it: the Whiskey Ring, the Erie Ring, the Customs House Ring, the Philadelphia Gas Ring, and the Washington Ring were but examples of a pervasive conspiratorial greed and dishonesty that critics feared was undermining American democracy.[8]

The choice of words was significant. "Ring" located the source of political corruption in the dishonesty and wrongdoing of a small circle of men. Rings were not complex party organizations but rather small "knots" of men who manipulated the political process to enrich themselves. "A 'ring' is, in its common form," explained the *Nation*, "a small number of persons who get possession of an administrative machine and distribute the offices or other good things connected with it among a band of fellows, of greater or less dimensions, who agree to divide with them whatever they take." That the word could be used to describe criminals with no connection to politics underscored its political meaning. It evoked a conspiracy to rob the public, a word roughly interchangeable with clique or gang, and it explained corruption as an outgrowth of moral failure, the product of greed.[9]

In offering a moral explanation of political wrongdoing, critics of rings created an image that fit comfortably within the rhetorical framework of republicanism. Republicanism's concern for civic virtue and its definition of corruption as the selfish pursuit of power and wealth at the expense of the commonweal continued to resonate after the Civil War. Those who attacked rings portrayed political wrongdoing in similar terms, as the work of grasping politicos with no concern for the well-being of the public. "The general good alone had no voice, for it had no ring," Henry Adams complained in an 1869 lament that summed up popular complaints about selfish politics.[10]

Although historians often describe the Tweed Ring as the prototypical political machine, the *Times*'s initial presentation of the scandal barely used the word. Rather, it made constant references to "the Ring" or referred to "that gang," or "that wretched cabal," terms that evoked a relatively narrow conspiracy rather than thoroughgoing organization. Even before the revelations broke, it warned of an "oligarchical form of government" in which power rested entirely in "the hands of four persons, viz: Mayor hall, wm. m. tweed, peter b. sweeny and richard b. connolly." The paper regularly capitalized the names of the four men (as it did for key figures in other reporting), a practice that gave the individual miscreants special prominence and reinforced the notion that the scandal was the work of a few immoral men.[11]

As the use of "ring" and its synonyms suggests, the dominant motif in the *Times*'s coverage was criminality. The paper peppered its coverage with references to theft and fraud. When Tweed and his allies insisted on their innocence before the most damning revelations and demanded proof, the *Times* compared them to "a gang of burglars." In the midst of the most powerful revelations, the paper charged that the "Tammany gang" was guilty of "robbing the public in a more audacious manner than ever." The Ring had undertaken "the gigantic robbery of the city"; its members were "municipal thieves" who had conducted

"schemes of plunder" and perpetrated countless "frauds" and "swindles." Denying that it had political motives, the paper insisted, of Mayor Hall, "we call him a thief because we can prove him to be one." What the paper presented to its readers was a case of theft in which the victim was an undifferentiated people and the perpetrators were a specific group of individuals.[12]

Such a critique also echoed the traditional republican fear of faction. In several instances the *Times* labeled the Ring a "corrupt faction." As that term implied, the paper saw Tweed and his confederates engaged in a "conspiracy against the public" which had to be checked through the consensual action of the community. When the Ring was defeated at the polls in November, the *Times* exulted that "the voice of the people is supreme" and that while their moral principles "may be momentarily stifled by dishonest factions," they would ultimately triumph.[13]

In the infrequent instances when the *Times* moved beyond its emphasis on public unity to offer social explanations of the Ring's power, it did so obliquely. The paper's obsession with the criminality of Tweed and his allies also had class implications, placing them outside the bounds of middle-class respectability. It occasionally noted the class origins of the Ring's support as well, which it claimed came from the "lowest dregs of our population." And the *Times* made periodic references to the need for "taxpayers"—which meant property holders at a time when assessment of real estate was the primary form of taxation—to organize against the Ring. The violence and upheaval of the Paris Commune, a radical revolt that briefly allowed workers to run the French capital, also lurked in the background. Although that uprising occurred during the spring, before the Tweed scandal broke, the coverage of it in American magazines and newspapers peaked in the summer, and the *Times* implied that ring rule might unleash similar forces in New York.[14]

Ethnicity occasionally informed the paper's analysis of the Ring's power as well. Of particular significance among Ring backers were ignorant immigrants, most notably the "Irish rabble" that had poured into the city over the previous three decades. The failure of the Ring to contain the "Orange Riot" led to attacks on it as a tool of Irish Catholic interests just as the *Times* accelerated its own offensive against the Ring. Although the paper insisted that respectable Irish did not support the Ring, the context of its commentary and its attacks on Tweed and Mayor Hall for supporting the Irish rioters framed the discussion of the political situation. The paper also published a special supplemental edition summarizing its Tweed investigation in both English and German, another tacit acknowledgment of the plural character of its audience. But discussions of the voters who put the Ring in power were uncommon, and neither class- nor ethnically driven interpretations of the scandal were explored in depth in the paper's revelations. The emphasis remained on the thefts themselves and the culpability of a handful of men, a depiction consistent with republican explanations of corruption

rooted in the dishonesty of Tammany leaders and a lack of civic vigilance among the people as a whole.[15]

As the *Times*'s sporadic stabs at social analysis suggest, the republican-tinged vision of a handful of selfish men grabbing power and wealth at the expense of the common good was becoming increasingly difficult to sustain. The paper was conscious of the class and ethnic dimensions of the Ring's support, but claims of acting on the behalf of a united public remained more useful. Explaining the origins and power of the Tweed Ring as a product of class or ethnic differences was not as effective because it required abandoning the still-powerful ideal of a consensual body politic. That ingrained vision, a republican inheritance, remained a powerful force shaping the paper's understanding of what Tweed and his partners had done and how they would be defeated.

The campaign against the Ring triggered by the *Times* exposures operated in similar terms. Mobilized largely by the paper's revelations, a small group of wealthy New Yorkers convened a mass meeting on September 5 to organize an anti-Tweed movement. Speakers at the meeting insisted that the anti-Ring crusade included citizens "of all nationalities, of all creeds, and of every party . . . the laborers, the rich and the poor of New York City." Another noted the presence of the city's "merchant princes, its bankers, manufacturers, shop-owners, clergy, members of the Bench and Bar, and the literary profession, not forgetting the gentler sex," as well as the "working element . . . the mechanic and the clerk." The *Times* reported, "It was emphatically a meeting of the people without distinction of social position or political opinion. The composite nationalities of our citizens were fairly represented and every interest, professional, mercantile, and industrial, sent some of its members to swell the vast assemblage."[16] Such claims masked the class character of the campaign and were a tacit admission that the city was divided by race, class, and interest.

Some scholars dismiss claims of unity as a smokescreen for class interests. There is some evidence to support such an argument. The featured speakers at the meeting were all prominent and successful men, and speeches urged "the taxpayer" to revolt against the Ring. The Committee of Seventy that emerged from the meeting was composed entirely of well-to-do businessmen. As Mary Ryan has noted, decision making in the tightly organized anti-Tammany campaign that followed appeared to rest in the hands of a select few and took place largely in private. The defeat of the Ring allowed members of New York City's economic elite to assume a more prominent role in city government, at least for a time. At the same time, the reelection of Tweed himself to the state senate pointed to the support he and Tammany continued to receive from lower-class voters, even in the face of the scandal.[17]

But the rhetoric of the campaign mattered. It underscored the utility of asserting consensus and the inability of many New Yorkers to accept a more pluralistic

politics. Despite clear evidence to the contrary, most reformers were unwilling to define themselves and their opponents in social terms, as contending groups, or to see in Tweed's persistent appeal evidence of alternative political agendas. Such reluctance reflected the political necessity of presenting a unified front and constructing an image of the public as united morally and politically even if divided socially. Whatever the reality of the social and political order, the republican-inspired fiction of consensus lent greater political legitimacy to civic action than did claims proceeding from the acceptance of moral heterogeneity.

The *Times*'s exposés brought the Tweed Ring national attention, but the art of Thomas Nast had the widest and most enduring impact. Appearing in *Harper's Weekly*, the preeminent middle-class magazine of the age, Nast's scathing caricatures of Tweed and his allies remain among the most famous and powerful examples of political cartooning in American history. Long critical of Democratic rule in New York City, Nast seized on the *Times*'s revelations as the basis for a series of devastating cartoons that played a central role in defeating the Ring. The *Nation* noted that it was "hardly possible to award too much praise" to Nast for his anti-Tammany work, which "brought the rascalities of the Ring home to hundreds of thousands who never would have looked at the figures and printed denunciations." Nast not only helped destroy the Ring; his caricatures of Tweed carved a place for themselves in the American political imagination as the classic representation of the urban party boss.[18]

The son of a German immigrant who fled the political upheaval surrounding the Revolutions of 1848 and a backer of the Republican Party from its founding, Nast had been an ardent supporter of the Union during the Civil War. He presented the conflict as a battle to preserve republican ideals of democracy, equality, and independence against an illegitimate, corrupt, and undemocratic Confederacy. Lincoln thought Nast "our best recruiting sergeant," and Ulysses Grant claimed that Nast "did as much as any man to preserve the Union and bring the war to an end." His postwar art, carrying the same moral fervor, commented on issues of equality and loyalty during Reconstruction and attacked the decline in political morals that seemed to set in just as Tweed rose to power. Nast remained fiercely Republican and presented that party as the sole vessel for civic morality in American politics. Not surprisingly, when an organizational style eclipsed the party's ideological commitments during the 1870s, the power of Nast's art diminished as well.[19]

Nast conceived of the Tweed scandal within the same framework he used to explain the Civil War and Reconstruction. His most famous Tweed cartoon, "The Tammany Tiger Loose" (Figure 2), used a Christians-and-lions motif to depict a ferocious beast attacking the prostrate feminine image of the Republic, with a shattered ballot box and a broken sword lying nearby. Tweed and his henchmen

look on from the emperor's box, underscoring the illegitimate and undemocratic nature of their power. After the defeat of the Ring in November 1871, Nast marked the triumph with a similar image of the Republic, shield in hand, triumphantly displaying a ballot box that had crushed Tweed, Hall, and Sweeny (Figure 3). Broadsides announced "Victory for the Republic" and "Down with Corruption" while images of the pope and other European monarchs looked on, surprised and dismayed. In both cartoons the Tweed issue was presented as a clash between the corrupt, monarchical tendencies of the Ring's leaders and the Republic—a monolithic entity that represented the interests of a virtuous, singular people.

The employment of feminine imagery heightened the straightforward moral formulation Nast offered. His use of the traditional depiction of a female republic to symbolize the purity of American institutions and American citizens reminded his audience that the issue of Tweed was a clear and simple one. Arrayed on one side was an inherently virtuous public; on the other were Tweed and his henchmen, malign forces that threatened the community's well-being. The association of reform and femininity implied that the partisan political world that produced Tweed was a masculine realm untouched by moral concerns. Such a portrayal not only reinforced the gendered boundaries that provided a rationale for excluding women from public life; it rendered the reform cause in simplistic moral terms that obscured the difficult work necessary to mobilize a diverse city on behalf of good government.

Nast dodged questions of social difference in other ways as well. Tweed, Sweeny, Connolly, and Hall were distinctive characters in his art, not archetypes representing specific social classes, and the predatory actions of the Ring were the deeds of individuals. When he juxtaposed the Ring's avarice with the plight of working-class rent payers, he echoed the defensive claims of the speech makers at the opening meeting of the Committee of Seventy, who insisted that the movement against the Ring had the backing of both rich and poor. Workmen are portrayed sympathetically, with upright, masculine stature and respectable dress (Figure 4). Only in rare instances did Nast betray fears of a working-class revolt. In one anti-Ring cartoon published before the *Times*'s revelations, he linked the Ring to the recent Paris Commune uprising, a connection he dropped from subsequent work. Otherwise, his visual assault on the Ring pitted a united public against the corrupt actions of a specific set of greedy and corrupt men.[20]

The racial dimensions of Nast's art were more pronounced. He invariably depicted Irish immigrants in simian terms, a conventional device in mid-nineteenth-century Anglo-American popular art. Although such images dominated his cartoons about religious and educational issues, they were marginal to his indictment of Tweed and his allies. Admittedly, Tweed was Scotch Presbyterian,

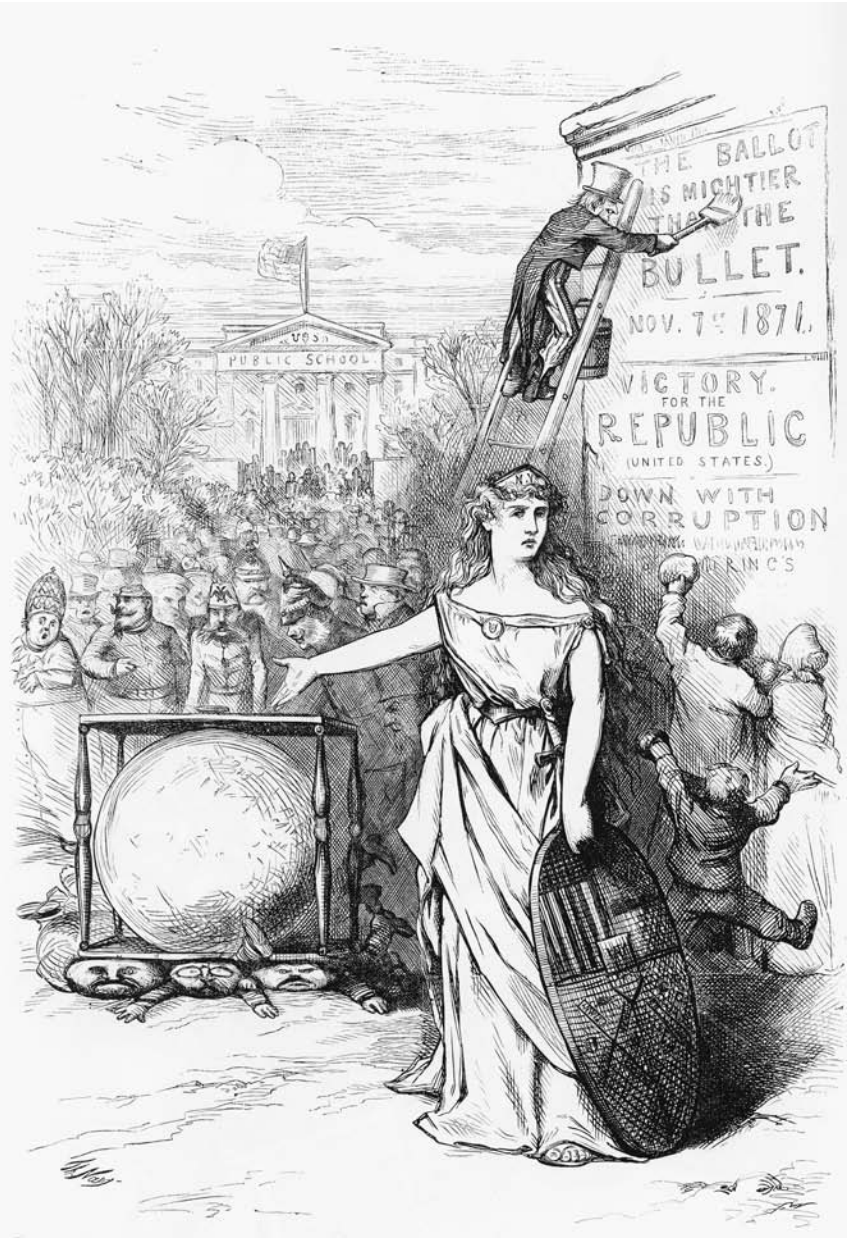


FIGURE 3. Thomas Nast's celebration of the Tweed Ring's defeat. *Harper's Weekly,* December 2, 1871.

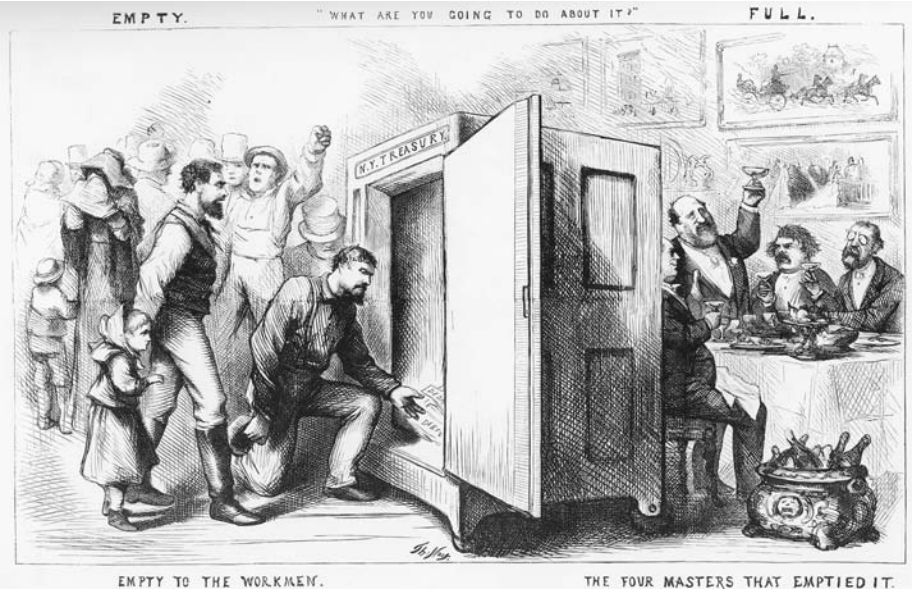


FIGURE 4. Thomas Nast contrasts the upright white workingman's want with the greed and extravagance of the Tweed Ring. *Harper's Weekly,* October 14, 1871.

but both Connolly and Sweeny were Irish. Yet Nast caricatured them in individualized ways with no reference to Irish racial features. In some cases, apelike Irish figures appear in Nast's anti-Tammany art, but they were rarely featured and more often were secondary elements in cartoons that emphasize the images of Tweed and the others. His depictions of the working class are clearly white (Figure 4). Again, in Nast's presentations the blame rested primarily with the handful of men who constituted the Ring rather than a particular class or group of people.

Nast's take on the Ring predominated. Most of the representations of Tweed and his confederates, as well as those of the campaign against them, relied on a republican formulation in which a corrupt faction schemed against a united, virtuous public. Acknowledgments of social diversity crept in, but they were usually dismissed as insignificant in comparison with the shared outrage that united New Yorkers on the question of Ring rule. In part this scenario represented a failure of imagination. Americans struggled to conceive of a public life marked by meaningful social and cultural differences. But it was also a politically useful formula, one that marginalized opposition as illegitimate. For that reason, it would remain a common political tool, even as asserting unity in the face of urban heterogeneity became increasingly difficult.

Buried in the anti-Ring furor of 1871 were hints of an alternative approach to political reform built on more pluralistic assumptions. A handful of observers had been calling for an end to universal suffrage since the Civil War, and they used the scandal to sharpen their arguments. Although Nast's art offered little in the way of social analysis, the occasional deployment of simian Irishmen in the periphery of cartoons about the Ring hinted at this kind of thinking. Two of the leading critics of the Ring, New York lawyer Simon Sterne and the Irish-born editor of the *Nation*, E. L. Godkin, explicitly rejected the prevailing view that the Ring was nothing more than a faction whose removal would solve all the city's political problems. They instead depicted Tweed as the outgrowth of a city split by class and culture, one that lacked a shared fund of civic values. They did not abandon republicanism's call for civic virtue but rather sought to circumscribe the electorate so as to restore the necessary moral consensus. Advocates of such a vision were decidedly in the minority during the summer and fall of 1871, when the crusade against the Ring was most intense. They would gain traction as it became clear that Tammany and its style of politics would survive the scandal.[21]

One of the earliest hints of this newer understanding of the Ring appeared in *Civil Rights: The Hibernian Riots and the "Insurrection of the Capitalists,"* an August 1871 pamphlet. It aimed to spur popular support for the anti-Tammany movement by linking the Ring with the Orange Riot that had occurred in early July. The seventy-four-page document included reprintings of newspaper articles (chiefly from the *Times* and the *New York Tribune*), profiles of Ring leaders, illustrations from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper,* and a newly commissioned Nast cartoon. In good republican fashion it argued that New Yorkers were losing their civil rights to a conspiracy headed by Tweed and his henchmen. This faction had both permitted an Irish rabble to run roughshod over the rights of Irish Protestants and robbed taxpayers through its corrupt activities.

But unlike the representations of the Ring in the *Times*'s reporting and Nast's cartoons, *Civil Rights* offered a sharp social analysis. It repeatedly emphasized the racial and religious character of Irish Catholics. The clash with the Orangemen was "the Hibernian riot," a label that ignored the provocations of the Protestant marchers. An initial attack on an Orange picnic in Elm Park came from a group of Irish laborers "herding" nearby. These rioters displayed the same "heathen barbarism" that had characterized the draft rioters eight years earlier. They were "simply savages" and "blind adherents" to Catholic leadership. The conduct of the many drunken Irish Catholic men involved in the violence was "disgraceful alike to the race they represented, [and] the religion they professed." The pamphlet included several letters to the *Times* that employed these themes, including

one that blamed the matter on the "ignorant Irish Roman Catholic multitude" and its "degraded instincts."[22]

The racialization of Irish Catholics was especially striking in contrast with depictions of Irish Protestants. None of the material in the pamphlet employed the evolutionary language used in reference to Catholics when discussing Irish Protestants. They were simply our "Protestant Irish brothers," who had suffered an infringement on their liberties when they were attacked by Irish Catholics just for exercising their rights to free speech and assembly. The Orangemen were "American citizens," or "the people," and the denial of their rights became a proxy for the denial of the rights of all New Yorkers. "Americans!" the *Times* writer proclaimed, "when Protestant Irishmen are prohibited from marching in our streets by a Roman Catholic mob, then be sure that you and I, and all of us will fall down and bloody treason flourish over us." An excerpt from the *Commercial Advertiser* reported that "the people of New York" felt a "sense of humiliation" as a result of the riot, erasing any distinction between the Orangemen and the people generally.[23]

The pamphlet offered a class analysis of the issues as well. The opening narrative of the riot made sure to mark the Irish who sparked the riot as "laborers" and the "hirelings of Tammany." Their opposition was made up of "tax payers" and citizens who had taken time away from their "business pursuits" to express their outrage at the mob and the conduct of the city's elected leaders. After the machinations of the Ring had received a full airing, a group of Wall Street businessmen called on their fellow financiers to refuse to pay city taxes, a campaign that first the *Tribune* and then the compilers of the *Civil Rights* pamphlet labeled the "insurrection of the capitalists."[24]

Civil Rights did not operate from the premise that the people of New York were united and the malfeasance of the Ring the work of a few miscreants. It quite frankly acknowledged the city's "cosmopolitan population." In defining the Catholic Irish as an inferior group on the basis of their racial, religious, and class character, in depicting the Orangemen as the only "citizens" involved in the conflict, and in conflating businessmen with "the people," it did implicitly what some would soon seek to do explicitly—to limit the privileges of citizenship to certain social and cultural groups and to exclude others. Such a formulation rendered the Ring illegitimate not only because of its corrupt leaders but also because the bulk of its support, or so the pamphlet's compilers contended, flowed from outsiders. It also made opposition to the Ring virtually a requirement for those claiming middle-class respectability. This logic foreshadowed an interpretation that would gain momentum as the anti-Ring movement faded, class tensions ratcheted upward in the city, and Tammany's persistence after Tweed became

clear. Ensuring that there would be no repeat of the Ring's depredations would require that the ranks of voters be trimmed. Only by restoring a political community of like-minded, virtuous, middle-class citizens could republican government and democracy work in the metropolis.

The vision of limited citizenship implied in *Civil Rights* was initially overwhelmed by the dominant motif of the anti-Ring campaign. The insistence on unity across class and ethnic lines remained an article of faith for most reformers. Election results in the fall of 1871, which removed the Ring from power, and 1872, when sugar merchant William Havermeyer was elected mayor for the second time (he had served in 1848–1849), seemed to vindicate this view. For most observers, the defeat of Tammany and the installation of "the best men"—Havermeyer and his fellow elites—solved the problem.

But an approach to city politics predicated on assumptions of moral consensus lacked staying power in a heterogeneous city. The Committee of Seventy and several allied groups had some short-term success, most notably the election of Havermeyer. They also proposed a new charter that although in many respects a compromise measure, empowered middle-class voters through a modified scheme of proportional representation. It also weakened the Board of Aldermen while shifting power to executive departments and unelected boards. But reform zeal soon faded. The Committee of Seventy disbanded in 1873 (only twenty-nine of the seventy bothered to attend the final meeting) without having produced significant structural reforms. Meanwhile, Tammany revived itself under the leadership of former county sheriff John Kelly, whose reputation had not been stained by the scandal. Kelly consolidated power by 1874 and continued to employ the same style of politics used by Wood and Tweed. He promised stability and low taxes to businessmen while doling out patronage and making symbolic gestures to the city's ethnic working class.[25]

The failure of the reform movement in the wake of Tweed rests to a large degree on its inability to cope with the demands of various interests in the city. Pursuing a policy of retrenchment, Havermeyer managed to offend nearly all the interests that the Ring had placated for so long. Germans grew angry at the lack of patronage they received. Both Irish and German immigrants complained about the mayor's appointment of non-immigrants to the Board of Emigration. Labor organizations howled about wage cuts for public works jobs and reductions in city employment. Businessmen, particularly uptown developers, grew frustrated by the slowdown in city-sponsored street and railroad construction projects. (Havermeyer even proposed to cut off city funding for the partially completed Brooklyn Bridge.) And the nonpartisan character of the reform movement was undercut when Havermeyer appointed nine Republicans as police justices—whose responsibilities involved dealing with petty crimes in city

wards—in place of nine Democrats. Havermeyer's policies reflected the reform movement that produced him. It was ill-equipped to manage the demands and conflicts of city life because it could not conceive of competing and contradictory yet equally legitimate interests.[26]

The final blow to any vision of a politics that was both inclusive and consensual came when economic depression sharpened class tensions. The city had already seen the largest strike in its history in 1872, when more than 100,000 workers walked off the job to demand an eight-hour day. Employers resisted fiercely and at times violently. When an investment panic sparked an abrupt economic downturn in 1873, class relations soured further. Labor groups demanded "work or bread" from the city. Business leaders and the local press characterized the campaign as "communist agitation." References to the "specter" of the Paris Commune repeatedly cropped up in newspaper coverage, stoking fears of a similar upheaval in New York. The conflict culminated in January 1874, when city police routed a mass demonstration held in Tompkins Square in support of city-funded aid to the unemployed. The dispersal of the crowd was so ferocious that labor leader Samuel Gompers later described it as "an orgy of brutality." Though no deaths occurred and injuries were modest in comparison with those of the Orange Riot and other disturbances, the clash marked a decisive moment in the hardening of class divisions in New York City. Any remaining hope of forging a harmony of interests between labor and capital seemed dashed, and the prospects for sustaining civic unity across class lines seemed more remote than ever.[27]

It was left to the handful of reformers who had rejected the vision of a united New York to chart a different course, one that confronted the heterogeneity of urban life more directly. Faced with the depredations of the Ring, these men did not share their peers' initial conclusion that New York City's problems stemmed from the misdeeds of a few thieves. The roots of the matter ran deeper, they asserted, into the new social and political order created by industrialization and immigration. Drawing on Social Darwinism, they argued that cities such as New York were now home to a mass of ignorant people lacking the education and intellect necessary for democratic citizenship. To remedy the situation required more than simply replacing a few corrupt leaders with public officials drawn from the ranks of the "best men." What was needed was an approach that empowered the respectable elements of the community while reducing or eliminating the power of the lower sorts who backed Tweed and his ilk.

Advocates of this position did not necessarily abandon the republican ideal of moral leadership based on civic consensus. Rather, they used Social Darwinism to formulate a republican vision of civic life adjusted to the circumstances of modern society. Their proposals took various forms, from outright rejection

of universal suffrage to a more nuanced plan to limit voting rights in matters related to municipal taxation and spending. Arguments in support of these ideas employed evolutionary logic, claiming that certain groups of people had not developed the moral and intellectual capacity required for good citizenship. If these inferior groups were eliminated, a political community made up only of those possessing the civic virtue necessary for republican government could be restored. Although this analysis recognized the diversity that accompanied urbanization, the political vision was a nostalgic one that sought a return to a preindustrial order.

This alternative conception of city politics did not arise instantaneously in 1871. A small number of politicians and reformers had worked to advance it at least since the end of the Civil War. Spurred by debates about the political status of newly freed slaves, they extended arguments for limiting voting rights to include the urban working class. In New York former Republican mayor George Opdyke and municipal reformer James Parton called for the elimination of universal suffrage well before the Tweed scandal. Declaring the lower strata of society incapable of participating in a democratic politics, they proposed to remove them from the body politic by limiting voting rights to substantial property holders. The attack on Tweed naturally fueled calls for suffrage limits, including proposals for a literacy test for all New York voters, but these demands earned little popular support, even at the apogee of the campaign against the Ring during the summer and fall of 1871. Only when the consensual rhetoric of the anti-Ring movement proved hollow did the majority of reformers begin to support more systemic alterations to the city's politics.[28]

Two men were at the forefront of efforts to remake New York's public life in this fashion. E. L. Godkin and Simon Sterne rejected the idea that the Ring was a temporary phenomenon best explained as a case of individual moral wrongdoing. Although they differed on some points of their analyses, both Godkin, a preeminent journalist and editor of the *Nation,* and Sterne, a New York lawyer, believed that the problem was a deeper one, traceable to the broad demographic and economic changes that were remaking urban society. Both viewed city life as fundamentally heterogeneous, and both were skeptical that universal suffrage would work in such a context. They had each developed this perspective before the Tweed Ring rose to its peak of power and popularity. The scandal that brought the Ring down only reinforced and intensified their views.

That Godkin and Sterne took the lead in formulating a more complex explanation of the Tweed Ring is not surprising given their backgrounds. They were younger, better educated, and more conscious of social differences than many of their fellow reformers. Both were born in the 1830s and reached adulthood well after American urban society had become self-evidently heterogeneous. Sterne,

born and raised in Philadelphia, came to New York immediately after finishing at the University of Pennsylvania. Godkin, an Irish-Protestant immigrant, moved to New York as a young man during the 1850s and resided there for most of the remainder of his life, although he traveled extensively in the United States as well. Both men were well versed in European intellectual trends. Sterne briefly studied at the University of Heidelberg, and Godkin attended Queen's College Belfast and maintained an extensive correspondence with European reformers. Sterne would cofound the *New York Social Science Review,* a journal dedicated to promoting free trade and the ideas of the British Social Darwinist Herbert Spencer. Godkin edited the *Nation* and made it the preeminent voice of the liberal reform movement of the late nineteenth century. He also helped launch the American Social Science Association. Each brought to their critiques of municipal affairs a distinctly urban sensibility and a background in social science, characteristics that would define the new generation of municipal reform advocates who would come of age in the 1870s and the analysis of urban politics they offered.[29]

Godkin was the foremost skeptic of mass democracy in the country. An Irish Protestant journalist, Godkin emigrated to the United States before the Civil War. After the war he became the founding editor of the *Nation,* a leading reform periodical, and later editor of the *New York Evening Post.* From these positions he emerged as a leading figure of the liberal reform movement during the Gilded Age. He was an elitist, an ardent advocate of civil service reform, an opponent of American imperialism, and a caustic critic of Gilded Age party politics. The volume and influence of his commentary on municipal public life was more extensive than that of any other liberal reformer. Acerbic both in person and in print, Godkin was a superb writer and an acute observer of American public life who wielded an extraordinary sway over public opinion in middle- and upper-class reform circles. William James remembered him as "the towering influence in all thought concerning public affairs," a man whose authority was "more persuasive than that of any other writer of the generation."[30]

Even before the Tweed scandal, Godkin had expressed doubts about mass suffrage. Writing in 1866, he lamented the establishment of "the government of mere numbers" in "our great cities" three decades earlier. He argued that heavy immigration had introduced into urban society too many poor newcomers ill-suited to the demands of democratic citizenship, and he insisted that it was now "clear that a great mistake was committed when no test of intelligence or education was prescribed for the exercise of suffrage." Over the next decade Godkin would remain among the most vocal critics of universal suffrage in heterogeneous urban settings, abandoning the idea only when prospects of its implementation diminished considerably.[31]

Such views placed Godkin at the forefront of those seeking a more systematic response to Tweed. From the start he exhibited a distinctive analysis of the issue, derived in part from his skepticism of universal suffrage. While the *Times,* the Committee of Seventy, and Thomas Nast generally imagined the Tweed Ring in republican terms, as the conspiracy of a handful of men working against the public interest, Godkin attempted a more original explanation, one that centered on the group sources of the scandal and ultimately proposed more radical responses. The combination of universal suffrage and an influx of ill-bred, uneducated, and impoverished immigrants provided a mass of voters for profit-hungry "adventurers" to manipulate. The excessively complex machinery of government provided offices and opportunities for these disreputable types to exploit, and the lack of "civic spirit" on the part of respectable New Yorkers allowed them to do so.

He framed this structural analysis in Darwinian-inspired social scientific terms. Tweed's rise to power was "distinctly the result of a process of evolution," Godkin explained in 1871. Looking back in 1875, he noted that Tweed was "the product of a state of things which his overthrow would not fundamentally change…he was a Boss because the condition of the voting population and the nature of governmental machinery made Bosses inevitable." He was "an amazing villain," Godkin concluded, "but nevertheless a legitimate outcome of his time."[32]

Godkin located part of the problem in the class stratification of New York City. The industrial development of the city had drawn a large number of people "whose main interest in life is to make sure of their daily bread for one or two weeks ahead." This created a substantial body of voters who were "ignorant and grossly corrupt." It was the force of the vote held by this "lower stratum" that allowed Tweed to gain and hold power. Only if "the industrious and intelligent classes" joined together to counter "the mere proletariat," he argued, could sufficient reform be enacted to make municipal governance work. It was this logic that led Godkin to propose limiting the franchise of the working class.[33]

Racial and nativist assumptions also buttressed Godkin's class analysis, even before the Tweed scandal. "We all know what the source of the evil is," he declared in an 1866 discussion of municipal government: "a swarm of foreigners have alighted, ignorant, credulous, newly emancipated, brutalized by oppression, and bred in the habit of regarding the law as their enemy." This influx led directly to a decline in the quality of political leadership: "one of the results, and, perhaps, the worst, of this enormous addition of ignorant strangers to our voting population is that they have created a class of politicians formerly unknown."[34]

The Tweed revelations reinforced this point, and Godkin's commentary made its Darwinian basis clear. Noting the "fundamental evils…underlying our city government," he declared it "an incontrovertible fact that not only a large portion, but even a large majority of our population consists of foreigners, ignorant,

unused to the exercise of the elective franchise, unendowed with the self-restraint and instinctive discrimination of men bred to the responsibilities of citizenship and self government." These newcomers had been "trained…to follow the leadership of the men whom we are trying to depose and keep deposed." The Irish were the chief case in point for Godkin. His religious inheritance—his father was a Protestant evangelist who conducted missionary work among Ireland's Catholics—fueled his skepticism of their capacity for republican citizenship, but Darwinian logic dominated his arguments. In terms of "political development," he argued, the peasantry who made up the bulk of mid-nineteenth-century Irish immigration were still in "the clan stage" and had not "passed through the same process of political and social development as the other races of Europe." In 1866 Godkin had expressed hope for the political assimilation of the Irish in "one or two generations." The Tweed revelations destroyed that optimism, replacing it with an evolutionary perspective that relegated immigrants to subordinate status for the foreseeable future.[35]

The presence of a large number of people lacking the intellectual and moral capacities for self-government threatened democracy in urban America. In the *Nation*'s commentary on the Tweed scandal, Godkin repeatedly stressed the importance of moral consensus in city politics. "All successful municipal self-government," he wrote in 1871, "has been carried on by small, homogeneous communities, animated by a strong sense of fellowship and identity of interest." In these settings voters were "united by the closest of ties, those created by race, religion, and history," and "their numbers were sufficiently small to make municipal acquaintance possible and give tremendous force to public opinion." In New York City, by contrast, "the heterogeneous composition of the population" made "public opinion and public spirit weaker" and made Tweed possible.[36]

This frank acknowledgment of the pluralistic nature of urban settings distinguished Godkin from most of his reform-minded contemporaries. While others thundered against "rings" on behalf of a singular people, he was among the few who abandoned the idea that all New Yorkers constituted a cohesive community. For Godkin, the challenge of reform after Tweed was the development of a system of government for "enormous masses of men, gathered under the influence of steam travel, from all parts of the world, differing widely in race, language, manners, traditions, [and] religions." Cultural differences combined with class resentments made common ground unimaginable. Of the boss's "frauds and defalcations," working-class voters "care little or nothing," Godkin claimed, "and if they turn their minds to them at all, they look on them as legitimate fleecings of the rich." Any reconstruction of the municipal order had to begin by recognizing these differences in values.[37]

Though as conscious of urban heterogeneity as Godkin, Simon Sterne did not turn to suffrage restriction as a remedy initially. He was first and foremost an advocate of proportional representation. Surveying local politics and Tammany rule during the mid-1860s, he became convinced that it was necessary to empower the educated classes to counter the influence of the less cultivated masses. Unabashedly elitist, he was critical of universal suffrage during the 1860s because it served as an "element of aggression" through which the poor could challenge the authority of the middle and upper classes. But he devoted most of his energies not to disfranchisement but to the establishment of "personal representation," a system of cumulative voting drawn from the ideas of English theorist Thomas Hare. By allowing voters to cast ballots for more than one candidate, this process would ensure minority representation—with the minority in this instance being the propertied classes—and limit the power of workers and the poor. In 1867 he helped create the Personal Representation Society to lobby for the implementation of cumulative voting.[38]

The Tweed scandal offered Sterne the chance to push for this measure. Named secretary of the Committee of Seventy, he helped guide the effort to unseat the Ring and install respectable leadership in city hall. But unlike most of his colleagues on the committee, he was not satisfied with so modest a fix. He helped persuade the committee to go further and propose a system of proportional representation modeled on the cumulative voting scheme he had been promoting since the 1860s. The explicit purpose was to ensure "minority representation." But many of his fellow reformers, including leaders of the nonpartisan Citizens' Association, were not yet prepared to abandon the ideal of civic unity and strongly opposed the idea, as did the leaders of the major parties. The plan ultimately met with defeat in the state legislature, but Sterne was not deterred. He would spearhead efforts to limit suffrage during the 1870s, and he would remain a proponent of cumulative voting throughout his career, publishing widely on the topic even when he became better known as a railroad lawyer and expert on business regulation.[39]

The most striking thing about Sterne's arguments on behalf of personal representation was their acknowledgment of differences within the body politic. Sterne saw urban society as divided into "the professional, the mercantile, the manufacturing, and the working classes," among other groups. These groups had competing interests that were not easily reconciled, and a political process that accounted for all of them was necessary. Under current arrangements, Sterne believed, all but the last were denied a voice in municipal government. In part, he believed that a restoration of an upper-class presence in city government would restrain the worst tendencies of the masses, a vision that echoed republican concepts of elite leadership. But as he later explained, "the whole tendency of

modern civilization is to differentiation," and it was necessary to craft a political process that recognized that development, an idea that pointed in the direction liberals would take municipal reform in the ensuing decades.[40]

Acknowledging the diversity of interests and cultures at work in the city did not automatically lead to the pursuit of a more exclusionary politics. Proportional representation was but one of many schemes that accepted social differences as part of political life. Yet even Sterne turned away from such plans, at least temporarily, when it came to city politics. In the wake of Tweed, a more dramatic response seemed both necessary and possible. For those anxious to preserve the comity assumed by republicanism, more strenuous efforts to assimilate working-class immigrants would seem to have been an option. But the scale of pre–Civil War immigration and a postwar sharpening of class tensions made such a plan appear unfeasible. During the mid-1870s Sterne joined Godkin and a growing number of other reformers to advocate a restriction on suffrage rights that would ensure a degree of moral consensus and civic virtue in political society. Faced with urban heterogeneity, these men sought to restore a harmony they imagined in the city's past by removing those they deemed outsiders from the heart of the political process.

Attempts to constrict the urban body politic peaked in a concerted effort to redesign municipal government in New York State during the mid-1870s. Godkin and Sterne both served on the "Commission to Devise a Plan for the Government of Cities in the State of New York," a body appointed by New York governor Samuel J. Tilden in 1875 to refashion city charters throughout the state and in New York City in particular. The Tilden Commission, as it came to be known, is best remembered for its most controversial proposal—a call to limit suffrage in certain municipal elections. The proposal set off a furious debate about the character of municipal democracy in the United States. It marked a transition, a final effort to manufacture consensus in city politics instead of assuming it. With its defeat, serious hopes of limiting mass suffrage in the urban North ended, although a few elite reformers continued to press for such restrictions directly or to nibble at the margins of voting rights.[41]

Tilden appointed the commission as a belated response to the Tweed scandal. By that time he was planning a bid for the Democratic presidential nomination and needed to burnish his credentials as a reformer. A New York City Democrat, Tilden had led the anti-Tweed effort within the party, but he still faced charges that he was linked to the Ring. The creation of the nonpartisan Tilden Commission fulfilled a campaign promise and put additional distance between himself and the Ring. Its eleven members were a mix of reformers and party politicians, including Godkin and Sterne. William Evarts, a Republican and key rival of Tilden's, served as chair.[42]

After lengthy deliberations the commission delivered its report in early 1877. Insisting that there were "fundamental errors" in the structure of city government, the commission reviewed various remedies, including increased state supervision, civil service reform, and efforts to generate public demand for good government. Though in some cases useful, these measures were insufficient, the report argued. What was needed was tighter control over city finances in the form of a Board of Audit, which would assume all spending and taxing powers. The Board of Aldermen, which currently controlled the municipal pocketbook in New York City and other large cities in the state, would remain but would be shorn of its role in managing city finances. The Board of Audit would be a superior tool for fiscal management, the commission claimed, because it would be chosen only by voters who possessed $500 in assessable property or who paid at least $250 in rent annually. The commission offered several other measures as part of a proposed amendment to the state constitution, but the centerpiece of its plan was to limit suffrage when it came to financial matters in cities.[43]

Restricting white men's voting rights was controversial. The commission recognized this point, noting the "natural disinclination of our citizens to attribute the disorders of our political system to the operation of general suffrage." Estimates of the impact of such a reform varied. The *New York Times* concluded that it would disfranchise 29 percent of voters; the *New York Sun* offered a figure closer to half of all electors; Sven Beckert has suggested the figure might have risen as high as 69 percent of eligible voters. Regardless of the figure, the proposal did not play well outside elite circles. The property qualification met with howls of protest from Tammany, labor activists, and other sources. The commission's proposed amendment became the key issue in the 1877 state election campaign, helping Tammany and Democrats seize control of the state legislature, where the amendment was killed before it could be submitted for a popular vote.[44]

Historians have, with good reason, viewed the Tilden Commission's proposal to limit suffrage as a key moment in the process of class formation in the United States. Beckert has described the campaign for the commission's amendment as a "decisive moment in the emergence of a self-conscious bourgeoisie." Surveying New York City politics at the opposite end of the social spectrum, David Quigley has also pointed to the contest over suffrage as a turning point in the politicization of the working class. As these and other scholars have made clear, the chief legacy of the bid for suffrage restriction was a sharper sense of class politics, not only in New York City but in cities around the country, where Gotham's clash over suffrage rights received close attention.[45]

These divisive results have to some extent obscured the nostalgic character of the Tilden Commission proposal. The purpose of suffrage restriction was in part the restoration of a lost world of independent republican citizenship. By defining

the working classes out of the electorate, at least in certain instances, it sought to restore an imagined political community of virtuous, propertied citizens animated by a shared civic morality and led by a clearly defined set of leaders. The commission's report pointedly noted that suffrage restrictions were not necessary in villages and rural settings, where property holders predominated and citizens drew on a common body of political values. But in cities, where the "reckless and vicious" part of the population was larger, efforts to restrict political power to the respectable classes was necessary. Limiting suffrage ensured unanimity because "good men cannot and do not differ" on municipal issues, the report argued.[46]

Advocates of voting restrictions also turned to the business realm for models of municipal government and politics. The modern city, Godkin had long insisted, was "not a political community"—which presumably encompassed many disparate interests—but a joint stock association that should be run by its stockholders, or in this case taxpayers.[47] *Harper's Weekly*, anticipating the commission's report, declared it "hardly possible that a dozen intelligent Americans should not agree that a municipality is not a political community for general purposes of government, but a corporation within such a community."[48] The commission's report echoed this sentiment, comparing city administration to running a railroad—the corporate model par excellence of Gilded Age America. The report argued that universal suffrage inappropriately permitted "conductors, brakemen, truckmen, engineers, and passengers" equal voice with "stockholders" in determining the board of directors. The class implications of such language were clear. Those who governed the city, at least in financial terms, should be drawn from the class of people who typically owned railroad stock. Those to be governed worked with their hands, or at least could not afford to invest in corporate enterprises.[49]

Suffrage restriction accommodated republicanism in another way as well, by producing a shortcut to civic virtue. City governments, the commissioners' report declared, were principally "contrivances to furnish protection to the industrious citizen, to the end that he may be left to pursue his private avocations with the minimum expenditure of time and trouble in attention to public affairs." The republican notion of a distinctive tier of leaders emerging from a homogeneous community through a demonstration of civic virtue appeared obsolete. The complexity of commercial and industrial enterprise left successful businessmen fully occupied by their private concerns and thus unable to participate in civic life. This state of affairs was not the businessmen's fault. As Sterne had explained, "the scientific and industrial results of the last three decades have produced this effect and not as is ordinarily charged, willful and perverse neglect of duty." City politics as it was constituted was too complicated and required full-time politicians to master it. The result was that a lower class of men

emerged as leaders, "a special class which is mainly recruited from unsuccessful merchants, unsuccessful lawyers, unsuccessful bankers, and unsuccessful manufacturers." Suffrage restriction combined with administrative simplification, the plan's backers asserted, would permit men who under modern conditions had to devote the bulk of their energies to business to return to their rightful positions as civic leaders.[50]

Although the commission's report did not use evolutionary logic to support suffrage restriction, Godkin and Sterne did so in public debate. They had both long claimed that the "lower stratum" of urban society lacked the intellectual and moral makeup necessary for democratic citizenship. Godkin criticized the "mental and moral condition" of half of New York's electorate in 1875. For Sterne, the businessmen he sought to empower over and against the "loafer element" and drones had earned their position through competition. The groups of men who currently governed large cities were "composed of men not emancipated from toil by reason of anterior self-denial, either on the part of themselves or their ancestors, in the accumulation of property, but are composed from such as are too low in organization for successful competition in the ordinary avocations of life, and unfitted for success therein." He would later warn of the "grave organic diseases" of city life and even cite the findings of zoologists that noted similarities between insects and humans.[51]

Not surprisingly, such arguments did not play well among the mass of New York City voters. Tammany leaders and labor activists both responded furiously to the idea of suffrage limits and used it to galvanize supporters. They were able to cast the plan as an attack on the rights of workers, a stance that further underscored their vision of a divided community. Even Governor Tilden recognized the surge of antipathy generated by the commission's proposed amendment and joined with labor spokesmen, Tammany, and most of the Democratic Party leadership in opposing a reduction in voting rights for those without property. Their combined force succeeded in defeating the plan.[52]

With the defeat of suffrage restriction, reformers had to look elsewhere. If they could not define the immigrant working classes out of the body politic as a way to restore civic cohesion, they would have to turn to other strategies to achieve their vision of responsible city politics. A few of the crankier reformers continued to push to restrict access to the ballot, but most realized that such measures were not politically possible. Although Sterne remained supportive of the idea of suffrage restrictions, he would devote most of his political reform energies to the promotion of proportional representation. Godkin recognized the defeat of the Tilden Commission plan as the death knell of efforts to eliminate mass voting. Universal suffrage had "come to stay," he would ultimately declare. The "most

serious question facing the modern world to-day is the question of the government of great cities under universal suffrage."[53]

To address such questions required devising an approach to urban political reform that took into account class and racial differences. Over the final two decades of the nineteenth century a further sharpening of class tensions and a new spurt of immigration would make that rethinking all the more pressing. In the short run the strategy of most reformers was to mobilize the middle class in a battle against the immigrant working class. They did this in part by attacking "the machine," a metaphor for corrupt political organizations that became popular during the 1870s. Compared with the term "ring," which it eclipsed, the machine metaphor evoked a deeper, more lasting, and more powerful challenge to the civic order, a threat rooted in the industrial age. Its ascent both reflected and helped usher in a redefinition of public life in social terms, as a clash between groups with divergent interests and values.

2

INVENTING THE MACHINE

Liberal Reform and the Social Analysis of Urban Politics

It is difficult to imagine a more evocative term for nineteenth-century Americans than "machine." As mechanized production reconfigured the nation's economic and social order, machines became highly contested symbols through which Americans (and Europeans) expressed a range of responses to rapid industrialization. As Leo Marx has noted, the machine image had "embraced a whole spectrum of meanings ranging from a specific class of objects at one end to an abstract metaphor of value at the other."[1] It could signify power, efficiency, and complexity, and it could remind people of the deadening effects of industrial labor. Representations of machines thus cropped up in intersecting debates about class relations, work and citizenship, technological progress, and material abundance in Victorian America.

Given this resonance, it is not surprising that the machine emerged in this era as a popular metaphor for party organizations, particularly those in cities. During the 1870s liberal reformers began filling periodicals with denunciations of "political machines" and explanations of their inner workings. As the term gained currency, labor activists would take advantage of its special connection to their own agenda to highlight the shortcomings of the major parties and encourage working-class activism.[2] Politicians responded to the term ambivalently, alternately embracing the metaphor's positive connotations and rejecting its thinly veiled criticisms. In the end, the negative sense prevailed, not least because liberal critics with considerable cultural authority advanced that usage.

What is surprising is the failure of historians to consider the term's origin and significance. Though fruitful in many areas, the linguistic turn that has driven so

THE "KELLY MOTOR" (UNLIMITED).

FIGURE 5. Tammany leader John Kelly as an indolent workingman running the party machine. The rise of the machine metaphor encouraged social explanations of political corruption that focused on class and race. *Harper's Weekly,* February 23, 1884.

much scholarship has not prompted researchers to investigate how so redolent a word came into use or its significance for understanding urban political change during the Gilded Age. Most historians and political scientists have been content to dissect the operations of big-city party organizations while ignoring the label itself. In particular, they have overlooked how the machine metaphor summoned forth images of power, progress, and complexity while also encouraging assumptions about the mindless obedience of foreign workers to the dictates of the boss. In ignoring these meanings, scholars have missed a chance to trace key shifts in late nineteenth-century political thought and practice.[3]

The symbolism attached to mechanical images of politics meshed enough with traditional critiques to gain a foothold in American civic discourse. Republican logic presented civic authority as arising naturally from the social order, in which the most prominent, respected men in the community, whose success reflected their good character, assumed positions of leadership in an organic process. Neighbors recognized their virtue and elevated them accordingly. By associating party politicians with man-made machinery, critics suggested an inorganic and thus illegitimate form of authority. Bosses were men whose power emanated from an artificial source, the machine. That metaphor provided a subtle reminder of the illegitimacy of partisan leadership. Only when the machine was dismantled could the best, most respected men resume their position as political leaders.

The machine metaphor also suggested something new. It implied a more complicated, potent, and permanent entity and invited systematic explanations of the sources and character of political institutions and processes, an impulse consistent with the rising cultural authority of social scientific analysis. The term's power derived less from its accuracy as a description of post–Civil War politics than from its class connotations. It was no coincidence that its familiar political usage first gained currency during the mid-1870s, just as the depression triggered by the panic of 1873 fueled class tensions in the urban-industrial North. References to "political machines" and "machine politics" cast party leaders as operators of mechanical devices akin to mindless factory hands rather than thoughtful and respectable republican gentlemen, and characterized voters as mere fodder, the fuel that made the machine run.

The overlay of new meanings on old critiques reflected a transition in reform thought under way during the Gilded Age. After the initial response to Tweed produced only ephemeral results, the authority of republican arguments that stressed individual morality gradually diminished. In their place arose Darwinian-tinged social scientific explanations of politics that attributed corruption to particular social groups—the working class and immigrants—rather than to the designs of a few individuals. The machine metaphor's suggestion that politicians were no more than factory hands fit with republican concerns about the character and standing of leaders. But its class connotations also encouraged explanations of political corruption tied to social and evolutionary forces. The machine metaphor helped invert the republican idea that civic virtue was a function of individual moral character by suggesting that it was a by-product of a person's class and racial background. In that context the task of reform became something more than a matter of changing leaders. It required either the exclusion of certain categories of people from power or the alteration of the social

environment that produced them. This transition was never wholesale; republicanism remained a viable language of dissent or criticism, and often it intermingled with social scientific representations of politics. But group-oriented social analysis ultimately overlaid and began to eclipse republican understandings of civic life that presumed moral unity, a shift both reflected in and furthered by the growing popularity of the machine metaphor.

A specific irony attended this transformation in political thought and rhetoric. Although designed to reinforce hierarchy, the social scientific conceptualization of urban public life also helped ratify pluralistic conceptions usually advanced by party politicians. In explaining or implying that machine politics was the province of particular class and racial groups, it attributed to those groups a distinctive set of political values and behaviors that had evolved over time. Corruption was not simply a matter of a few selfish people who departed from a prevailing moral consensus about proper political behavior. The implicit acknowledgment that there were multiple sources of political morality active in American public life echoed the pro-party argument that presented politics as the management of group conflict.[4]

The principal authors of this new analysis were the liberal reformers we remember as "Mugwumps." Supposedly an Algonquin word for "big chief," Mugwump was the derisive nickname coined to describe a small set of well-educated northeastern Republicans whose dissatisfaction with party politics intensified during the 1870s and 1880s and culminated in their endorsement of Democratic presidential candidate Grover Cleveland in 1884. Leading liberal reformers, including E. L. Godkin, George William Curtis, James Russell Lowell, Henry Adams, and Charles Eliot Norton, emerged as fierce critics of the Gilded Age political order; their signature cause was civil service reform, but they also weighed in on business regulation, tariff reform, currency questions, foreign policy, and, not least, urban politics.[5]

Republican presidential candidate James Blaine, whose 1884 candidacy sparked their defection to Cleveland and the Democrats, dismissed liberal reformers as "noisy but not numerous." But the noise they made mattered, if not always in the ways they hoped. Their extensive access to print—Godkin edited the *Nation,* Curtis ran *Harper's Weekly,* and Adams for a time edited the *North American Review*—gave them cultural authority as writers, lobbyists, and critics, even as they found themselves cut off from the conventional power of party leadership and elective office. As Nancy Cohen has argued, "liberal reformers, by virtue of their strategic positions in American culture, were able to frame the terms of political debate, determine the issues, and establish values to which others had to conform." Cohen overstates things a bit; Mugwumps failed to restore

"the best men"—men such as themselves—to power, one of their key objectives. Instead, by lending their voices to the pursuit of class rule, they inadvertently set the stage for the legitimation of pluralism.[6]

Although Americans had long spoken of the "political machine," the phrase's meaning shifted after 1850. Once a neutral term signifying the workings of the entire political realm, by the 1870s it entered fully into public discourse as a derogatory reference to seemingly unprincipled, organizationally oriented politics that was particularly but not exclusively evident in cities. Its disdainful connotations did not go uncontested; party politicians occasionally spoke of machine politics with pride, usually stressing the efficiency and productivity of modern mechanisms in both politics and industry. But the negative meaning carried the day, largely because it fit neatly with an emerging social analysis of politics proffered by the small but culturally powerful set of elite liberal reformers.

Machines were not an inherently derogatory symbol. Representations of mechanical devices had often carried positive connotations for nineteenth-century Americans, particularly in the antebellum years. They celebrated technological innovations as evidence of progress and a source of material plenitude. Citing "the numberless contrivances and inventions for our comfort and luxury which the last half-dozen years have brought forth," Walt Whitman advised Americans to "bless your star that fate has cast your lot in the year of our Lord 1857." A prewar writer describing the "effects of machinery" in the *North American Review* argued that mechanized production was "by far the most efficient physical cause of human improvement" and that it "does for civilization, what conquest and human labor formerly did and accomplishes incalculably more than they accomplished." Not surprisingly amid such extravagant assertions, some saw machines as a means of creating utopia. Other observers stressed the capacity of industrial production to deliver material benefits while reducing the time spent working. German immigrant J. A. Etzler published two books, *The Paradise within the Reach of All Men, without Labour, by Powers of Nature and Machinery* (1836) and *The New World, or Mechanical System* (1841), which proposed to harness wind, water, and sunlight to power devices that would not only provide for humankind's every need but create a more equitable society as well.[7]

Apologists for industrial development also presented mechanized production as compatible with the promotion of good citizenship. Machines were not only a source of material abundance but tools for inculcating civic virtue. Replying to English critic Thomas Carlyle's denunciation of industrial labor, Timothy Walker's "Defence of Mechanical Philosophy" argued that because they provided plenty for all, machines fostered the rough equality essential to democracy. Others insisted that industrial work instilled the discipline necessary for effective

citizenship or cited the labor-saving impact of new technologies that allowed workers the leisure time necessary for reading and self-improvement. It was in this vein that the *Scientific American* reported in 1849 that the rise of machinery had helped "render mankind virtuous and happy."[8]

If such claims seemed exercises in wishful thinking, it is because they were so often defensive in character. Substantial misgivings about the impact of machinery on the American social and political order arose from the start. Many writers, artists, and commentators depicted industrialization as a destructive force that was ravaging an idyllic natural world. Workers and their advocates complained that the repetitive, unskilled character of industrial labor damaged the mental and moral faculties of those forced to perform it and reduced their capacity to be independent citizens. While such fears, particularly those about mechanization's impact on workers, were more substantial in Europe, they nonetheless found their way into print in the United States. After the Civil War growing labor strife and increasingly sharp criticism of machine-driven labor by the workers' classes and union organizers fed popular ambivalence and uncertainty about the benefits of machines. Expressions of fear and hostility toward mechanized production began to crowd out celebrations of industrial progress.[9]

Throughout the nineteenth century writers and artists used images of machines to represent an intrusive force that was destroying an idyllic rural world. The "machine in the garden" motif evoked a range of unsettling cultural changes associated with rapid industrialization. Locomotives disrupting peaceful pastoral settings, steamboats invading the pristine wilderness, and other images of machinery disturbing and ultimately destroying settings characterized by natural harmony and beauty became stock themes in literature and painting in nineteenth-century America. When political reformers began to depict party organizations as machines, they employed an image that already represented a corrosive force capable of annihilating previously pure environments.[10]

Changes in work fueled by industrialization created another politically potent set of meanings associated with machines. Commentators in England and the United States sharply attacked the social and political impact of factory work on laborers. Thomas Carlyle, perhaps the most significant of the English antimachine figures, warned of men growing "mechanical in head and in heart." While such laments referred most directly to the condition of labor, they had political implications as well. Carlyle's particular target was Utilitarianism, but he was also issuing a more general warning, as Leo Marx has noted, of "an excessive emphasis upon means as against ends, a preoccupation with the external arrangement of human affairs as against their inner meaning and consequences." In the United States similar complaints could be found as early as the 1820s. J. K. Paulding's "The Man-Machine; or, the Pupil of Circumstances" criticized the

social and political consequences of the factory system, particularly the rigid, dehumanizing form of labor it imposed on workers. Others warned that operatives would become "slaves of the factory" oppressed by the "tyrannical government" of proprietors. William Henry Channing, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Herman Melville issued similar criticisms during the 1840s and 1850s. Such complaints connected machines with thoughtless routines, the antithesis of the engaged, independent-minded citizenship necessary in a democracy.[11]

Though these complaints did not carry the day in the United States, even defenders of machine-based production cast doubt on the intellectual capacity of the average worker. Most Americans still celebrated the rise of machinery as evidence of technical progress and the source of material abundance. After the Civil War, defenders of the machine recognized the changes in the nature of work wrought by industrialization but voiced approval for them. Carroll Wright, appointed the first commissioner of the new federal Bureau of Labor in 1885, insisted that routinized factory work was a form of uplift, inducing "better morals, better sanitary conditions, better health, [and] better wages" for the otherwise slothful, dull-witted masses. Others, most notably Frederick Winslow Taylor, made similar arguments. At the base of many such claims was the Darwinian-fueled belief that the immigrants and rural migrants who constituted the bulk of the industrial labor force were inherently inferior. "The majority of human minds are weak, and slow, and could do little in the world but for simple tasks adapted to small and barren brains," wrote an advocate of mechanized production. "Monotonous toil suits them exactly.... The exact and punctual habit, which the machine engenders, trains careless minds with a discipline most wholesome." Such arguments also reinforced visions of industrial workers as incapable of meeting the standards necessary for democratic citizenship.[12]

From the beginning, representations of machines were bound up in the process of class formation. The debates about mechanization that unfolded in the decades before the Civil War were in many respects about determining social relations in an emerging industrial order. As skill became less necessary in manufacturing and the traditional classifications of mechanics and merchants grew less salient, new categories based on a person's relationship with machinery emerged. Those who worked with their minds—"head work"—constituted the middle class. Those working with their hands made up the working class.[13]

By the time political reformers began to use the machine metaphor, debates over the consequences of industrialization had invested it with a range of meanings that made it an effective term of political derision. Not only did it evoke visions of a force that destroyed the purity of a virginal, harmonious America and corrupted workers; it symbolized complexity, power, and permanence. The massive Corliss Engine, displayed at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia,

embodied the scale and power of industrial machinery, as did huge factories and powerful locomotives. Presented as both a beneficial and a detrimental force, machines were a significant cultural presence in the United States during the final decades of the century. Labeling party organizations as machines ensured that they would be seen as a force to be reckoned with, one fully capable of undermining American democracy and corrupting the American people.

Gilded Age reformers were not the first to speak of machines in a political sense. Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century politicians occasionally referred to government—both its institutions and personnel—as a machine. The word had its origins in Enlightenment thought: Isaac Newton had used it to describe nature in mechanical terms, as a realm governed by a distinct and coherent set of natural laws. The political institutions of a particular society worked in a complex but consistent (and thus comprehensible) manner, and politics was a science devoted to understanding the processes and people that defined these institutions. John Adams characterized the British constitution in 1775 as a "great machine [that] will not go any longer without the new wheel," and Thomas Jefferson wrote of "the great machine of government." As late as the Civil War era, Abraham Lincoln spoke of "running this machine," a reference to leading the national government. The term was used in this fashion regularly to describe the U.S. Constitution during the nineteenth century—James Russell Lowell famously declared it "a machine that would go unto itself" in 1888—and echoes of this usage could be found in depictions of politicians as skilled workmen. But Enlightenment-derived meanings gradually faded, and the class implications of the term sharpened as it entered the political vernacular.[14]

As the debate over the nature of mechanized production intensified, the negative connotations attached to political uses of the machine developed. This early usage tended to indicate a powerful but temporary political movement or organization. As early as the 1830s, supporters of Andrew Jackson's campaign against a national bank described the object of their antipathy as a "machine." During the 1850s the phrase "political machine" began to appear in political discourse as an epithet. The *New York Times* reported in 1853 that prohibition legislation in Rhode Island had become a "political machine" because it was so widely supported that neither party dare oppose it. A few years later a New York Democrat complained that various patronage-laden railroad bills would create "powerful political machines" controlled by Republican politicians. During the Civil War one observer complained that the U.S. War Department "has become a huge political machine, where officers of all ranks are manufactured to gratify political friends and conciliate enemies."[15]

One theory about the development of the term "machine" as a political metaphor connects it to fire companies. Before the Civil War these volunteer groups

had a reputation as proxies for party organizations in cities, and fire engines themselves were called machines. Fire companies were sources of masculine solidarity and in some cases useful vehicles for advancing political causes and candidates, though the extent of that connection varied from city to city. The phrase "running with the machine" cropped up occasionally in popular discourse, at times in political contexts. It referred to company members who pulled the engine or ran alongside it on the way to fires. The overlap between fire companies and party organizations lent the phrase a political connotation that seemed to stick.[16]

The use of "machine" as a metaphor specifically for durable, patronage-driven, organizational party politics developed gradually. By the middle of the nineteenth century, critiques of machine politics as a style or type of organization and method rather than a transitory movement began to seep into the popular political idiom. In 1858 the *New York Tribune* noted the existence of a "'masheen' party"—the phonetic spelling hinted at the working-class Irish character of the organization—in the city's first ward. Three years later a reformer warned of the "modern and monstrous instrument known as the political party machine," which "crushes honesty and uprightness as effectually as the wheels of the Juggernaut does its victims." Both uses of the word underscored its novelty, as street slang and as a "modern" phenomenon in need of explanation. As late as 1871, the label "Tammany machine" appeared only a handful of times in discussions of the Tweed scandal.[17]

Only after Tweed's fall did the term "machine" begin to enter the vocabulary of liberal reformers regularly. Writing to Carl Schurz in 1872, E. L. Godkin complained that the recently formed Liberal Republican Party promised little more than "the construction of a new party machine out of the pieces of the old ones." After an 1876 meeting of "Independents" in New York City, Henry Adams cited dissatisfaction with the "two political machines" or "the party machines" as one of the driving forces of the reform movement. Reporting on the "Whiskey Ring" scandal in the *North American Review* that same year, H. V. Boynton declared that "the machine, without regard to party, is corrupt" and that "the machine of party is opposed to pure government." Boynton's mixing of metaphors—both the ring and the machine appear in his piece—and his emphasis on corruption and pure government highlight the gradual transition taking place in reform vocabulary. Traditional republican concepts endured, overlaid and mixed with newer terms and symbols such as the machine.[18]

Attacks on machine politics by liberal reformers were echoed in the daily press. Indeed, it is possible to date the emergence of the machine metaphor as a common element of the American political vocabulary with some precision by examining newspapers. A group of liberal reformers displeased about

the manifest corruption of the Grant administration organized an independent movement during the mid-1870s aimed at pressuring Republicans to nominate a candidate unsullied by spoils politics. In 1876 their efforts came to a head, not only with a national meeting in New York in May but in campaigns at the state level. Among the most significant was the effort of New York reformers to unseat Senator Roscoe Conkling, a potential presidential nominee, and his allies as the leaders of the state Republican organization.[19]

It was in this endeavor and similar campaigns in other states that references to "machine politics" as a style as well as to "the machine" became common. New York was the epicenter of the liberal reform movement, and independent-minded groups such as the Union League announced their opposition not only to Conkling but to "the methods of machine politics" as well. Taking its cue from an attack on Conkling and "the machine" in Godkin's *Nation*, a March 1876 editorial in the *Chicago Tribune* on "machine politics" lamented the pervasiveness of spoils politics in the city, in Illinois, and nationally. In May a "Delegate" reported to the *Tribune* on the role of "machine politics and ring politicians" at the Illinois Republican Convention. A few days earlier the same paper dismissed criticism from rival partisan sheets by labeling them "'machine' papers." Over the course of the spring and summer both the *Tribune* and the *Times* regularly discussed machine politics as a new kind of politics, often prompted by commentary from liberal periodicals and publicity campaigns. The derogatory meaning of the term was self-evident in each case.[20]

The term's novelty was underscored in several ways. Liberal reformers peppered their speeches and articles with definitions and explanations of the term during the 1870s and 1880s. Boynton wrote of "combinations inside politics"—the "senators, representatives, local politicians in swarms, the whole Washington lobby with its ramifications reaching every part of the land, thieves, detectives, officials at the White House" that, "in a word," constituted "the machine." For R. R. Bowker, it was not simply "organization" but "the abuse of organization which is stigmatized as the 'machine.'" Civil service proponent Carl Schurz complained of "that kind of 'machine politics' which consists in mere struggles for power and plunder." An August 9, 1876, edition of the *New York Times* featured several letters debating the term's connotation. The editorial that accompanied them expressed ambivalence about the term, praising the energy such organizations provided but decrying the "evils" associated with this political style. Placement of the phrase inside quotation marks, another common practice during these years, also signaled the newness of the term. Essays explaining this new phenomenon filled newspapers and magazines during the 1870s and 1880s.[21]

The attraction of the machine metaphor stemmed at least in part from its implication of thoughtless, unprincipled politics. Advocates of civil service reform,

the Mugwumps' signature issue, used it to signify the distinction between the principled, virtuous politics they favored and the selfish spoils politics that had come to dominate American public life after the Civil War. Carl Schurz dismissed Samuel Tilden's 1876 presidential bid because he was a "wirepuller and machine politician" rather than a "man of principle." The speeches of New York senator and "machine politician" Roscoe Conkling had exhibited "no thought or suggestion of thought on any subject of any interest to any human being," the *Nation* declared the same year. As the 1880 election approached, Philadelphia reformer Henry Lea declared his opposition to Secretary of the Treasury John Sherman because he was "wielding all of the power of the machine in the old way to receive the succession." A month later Lea sent E. L. Godkin a speech he had given to the Pennsylvania State Republican Convention, boasting that "it may set men to thinking and thinking is exactly what the machine deprecates."[22]

Although they applied it to spoils politics at all levels of the polity, reformers found that the machine metaphor proved especially apt for describing urban public life. The complexity of party operations increased dramatically during the 1870s and 1880s, and these developments were especially evident in cities, where party leaders forged increasingly elaborate grassroots organizations. The "machine" label thus became most closely associated with metropolitan settings. In one of its first extended discussions of how machine politics worked, the *New York Times* made its urban character clear, describing how local party leaders organized their district on a block-by-block basis and operated in "tenement house" sections. Two days later the paper contrasted "old fashioned politics," which it linked with village life and "its almost pastoral simplicity," with the urban phenomenon of machine politics.[23]

The most widely circulated discussions of machine politics tended to center on cities as well. Godkin focused much his writing about the conduct of party politics in urban settings and especially New York, where he feared that an influx of racially inferior foreigners and overly complex institutional arrangements fueled the worst abuses. His concern no doubt stemmed from his position as editor of the *New York Evening Post*, but it also reflected his belief that the United States was becoming an urban society and that the problems of modern democracy would be worked out in cities. Likewise, a young Theodore Roosevelt published a long essay on New York City politics in *The Century* which located the phenomenon of machine politics firmly in the nation's "great cities." The first fictional works depicting machine politics, such as Rufus Shapley's *Solid for Mulhooly* and Paul Leicester Ford's *The Honourable Peter Stirling and What People Thought of Him*, were usually set in urban locales. There were certainly denunciations of machine politics in the context of state and national politics, often by partisans who found the term handy for denigrating their opponents,

but the link to urban politics grew increasingly strong over the final years of the nineteenth century.[24]

Perhaps the best indication of the association between the machine metaphor and the city came with the publication of James Bryce's *The American Commonwealth* in 1889. Bryce, an English politician and scholar, was heavily influenced by Mugwump informants, particularly Godkin, and the book enshrined many elements of liberal reform thought. In its discussion of "how the machine works" the book focused almost entirely on "great cities." After dealing with machine politics in "rural districts and small cities" in two paragraphs, it devoted eight pages to large cities. The following two chapters, which further explained how the machine operated, concentrated equally as much on cities. As Bryce pointed out, the four conditions necessary for machines to thrive—patronage politics, the chance to profit from officeholding, a "mass of ignorant and pliable voters," and "the neglect of civic life by good citizens"—were "most fully present in great cities." Although the term remained applicable to spoils politics on all levels of the polity, by the end of the nineteenth century urban party organizations emerged as the examples par excellence of machine politics.[25]

Notwithstanding its popularity, the machine metaphor was not an especially apt description of nineteenth-century urban party politics. The suggestion of power and efficiency evoked by that image was misleading, particularly in reference to big-city organizations. With the possible exceptions of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, no major cities featured a centralized party organization that held firm control of municipal government before the 1880s. In New York, as Martin Shefter has noted, Tammany did not consolidate its authority over the Democratic Party until the end of that decade. Factional conflict within parties was far more common. The machine metaphor suggested that parties, especially urban parties, had established a level of power and efficiency they did not possess. The label certainly did not apply when it first became popular, and it is debatable how often party operations ever lived up to such implications.[26]

The rise of the machine metaphor is better explained by its class overtones. If party organizations were elaborate mechanisms, then the politicians who ran them were best imagined, in the words of the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, as "mere tenders and feeders" of the machine, men who gave little thought to the operation of their political device. Civil service reformer George William Curtis compared party organization to a "locomotive" and labeled its leaders "drivers of the machine." When James Russell Lowell, poet laureate to the Mugwump set, complained about the effects of universal suffrage in cities in 1884, he drew on the image of manual work when he argued that "the hands that wielded" the vote "were untrained to its use." Such references placed party bosses and

their supporters in the lower reaches of the working class, well removed from the ranks of respectable, middle-class Americans, not to mention the gentlemen leaders of the preindustrial era.[27]

By depicting party politicians as workers, the machine metaphor helped reformers prod the upper and middle classes. The charge that respectable citizens too often ignored politics to pursue their private interests remained a central element of the Mugwump explanation of why bosses and machines succeeded. The *New York Times* specifically targeted the "wealthy and leisured class," which was "indifferent to politics" and thereby ceded civic leadership to "machine politicians." The paper looked back longingly to the markedly different class system of the preindustrial era, when "substantial old citizens" such as "the village blacksmith and the dignified deacon" worked the polls on election day. Making politicians into disreputable workers had at least the potential to alarm the increasingly class-conscious upper and middle ranks of urban society, spurring them to coalesce politically and fulfill their civic duties.[28]

Yet even as such nostalgia called the civic virtue of the bourgeois into question, it encouraged a reconfiguration of republicanism. The deployment of the machine metaphor opened the way for the argument that good civic character was a product not of individual moral integrity but of class position (and, as many reformers would eventually argue, racial origins). Playing to middle-class prejudices, it promoted the idea that certain categories of people were capable of good citizenship but others were not. That warped variant of republican thought would endure as an element of a new social scientific approach to civic renewal in cities.

One of the fullest expressions of the class implications of the machine metaphor appeared in a February 23, 1884, cartoon in *Harper's Weekly* (Figure 5). "The Kelly Motor" portrayed Tammany boss John Kelly operating a device labeled the "New York City Democracy." Seated on a barrel of gin and wearing overalls and a workman's cap as the machine runs itself, Kelly reclines against the wall reading a newspaper. The machine haphazardly spits out its products, political offices and contracts. The image neatly captures the moral failing, corruption, and absence of principle that reformers believed characterized machine politics. It also rendered Kelly, a wealthy politician who painstakingly cultivated an image of bourgeois respectability, an indolent laborer lacking even the pride and bearing of a skilled workman.

The machine image also rendered voters insignificant. The power supply for the Kelly Motor flows from a gin mill across the street, a reminder of the moral character of the voters who kept Tammany in power. It is a disembodied image—no specific voter appears in the cartoon. Like the *Harper's* drawing, most representations of machine politics focused on leaders. Voters, if they appeared

at all, were usually categorized as thoughtless dupes—"ignorant and pliable," in Bryce's words—a description bolstered by the Darwinian-fueled perception of immigrants as racially inferior.

The rise of the machine metaphor elevated a complementary phrase: the political boss. This label for party leaders was not new; references to the boss in a political sense had emerged around the Brooklyn Navy Yard as early as the 1840s. The sensational corruption of Boss Tweed during the early 1870s introduced it to a national audience, and it entered the political lexicon more fully over the ensuing decade. Amid the labor upheavals of 1877 the *Chicago Tribune* began commenting on what it called "bossism" in city politics. "The country has become familiar with the rule of Bosses," it noted, citing Tweed and the equally controversial Alexander Shepherd of Washington, D.C. The paper discussed a series of local political figures, most notably German politico Herman Lieb, before warning against the type of politics they practiced and the corruption that was sure to follow. By the late 1870s and 1880s, discussions of "the boss," "bossism," and "boss politics"—often with quotation marks around the terms to indicate their novelty—were commonplace in respectable magazines such as *Harper's Weekly, Scribner's Monthly, The Independent,* and the *Nation.*[29]

The origins of these terms in a labor milieu imbued them with a meaning that reinforced the class connotations evident in references to machine politics. As Jon Teaford has noted, the term "boss" remained a loaded one, a "code word with heavy socioeconomic overtones" that "reflected deeper-seated ethnic and class divisions in the city." The label "Boss" on Kelly's cap in the 1884 *Harper's* cartoon joins with the overalls and rolled-up sleeves to underscore his blue-collar character. Such class distinctions became stock elements of editorial cartoons devoted to urban politics. By the 1880s, caricatures of urban party leaders routinely cast their subjects as members of the urban proletariat, complete with short hair, garish clothing, and other hallmarks of disrepute likely to repel middle-class voters. A pastiche of images in the pro-reform *Puck* summarizing the career of New York's Morrissey, a boxer turned New York City ward leader, made these implications explicit. It assigned to him the full range of lower-class iniquity, including prison time, a career in boxing, and links to liquor and gambling. These characteristics were reinforced with hints of Darwinian logic, most notably the apelike representation in the cartoon's final panel. There can be little question that the intent of the artist was to render Morrissey in a manner that raised alarm among respectable people.[30]

Though it was a powerful expression of disparagement, the machine metaphor had ambiguities that gave it the potential to take on more positive connotations. Descriptions of the machine as an intricate device could imply that its operators were skilled workmen. That emphasis on skill fit with a key contention

bosses offered on their own behalf, that politics required training and expertise. When James Bryce described politicians as men with "a familiarity with the wheels, shafts, and bands of the party machine, together with a skill in working it," he bolstered such a claim. Writing of Roscoe Conkling, *Scribner's* gave the New York politician similar credit. Though he was never a man of ideas or principles, the magazine averred, Conkling had demonstrated "a good deal of skill in manipulating the machinery of politics."[31]

The machine metaphor's class implications also intersected with the era's debates over gender in ways that could benefit party politicians in their clash with reformers. Representations of bosses as workmen reinforced the argument that politics was a manly enterprise. A favorite counter to activist reformers among party politicians was to depict good-government advocates as effeminate and conventional party politics as masculine. If party politics was a form of manual work, it was all the more a part of the male public sphere. Such a formulation only heightened the contrast between the man's world of vigorous political work and the feminine realm of impractical, moralistic reform. Big-city politicians would sharpen these responses during the 1890s as they developed an affirmative defense of machine politics in response to their critics.

Urban politicians even tried to harness the machine metaphor for their own benefit, evoking the positive meanings associated with the term, particularly its connotation of power and efficiency. Before scandal hit, the Tweed Ring's Peter Sweeny bragged that the Ring had mobilized voters "with the precision of a well oiled machine." As the negative meaning of the machine developed, such efforts grew more defensive. "We are told the Republican party is a machine," retorted Conkling to his critics. "Yes. A government is a machine; the common school system of the state of New York is a machine; a political party is a machine. Every organization which binds men together for a common purpose is a machine." A Tammany district leader sounded a similar note: "Even a church needs a vestry, which is its machine for carrying out the wishes of his congregation." Party organizations simply provided that mechanism for "the people." In Philadelphia, Republican John Bardsley proudly proclaimed in 1876 that "somebody must run the political machine," noting that "there are 70 men in Councils. They can't all run it; somebody must run it, and those with the most brass or cheek [have] done so."[32]

On the whole, however, the negative connotations of the machine metaphor far outweighed the positive. By century's end, the term was established in public discourse as one of disparagement. It was still possible to encounter a politician who used the phrase "political machine" in a positive sense. But as the perceptive Moisie Ostrogorski noted in 1902 (see below), by the 1890s most politicians rejected this "nickname," preferring to "style themselves 'the Organization.'"

The term's class implications were too strong to deflect in an era of sharp class tensions.[33]

The rise of the machine metaphor both reflected and fostered a shift in political thought. The complexity it conveyed suggested that careful analysis—not just moral condemnation—was necessary if reformers were to understand how American city politics worked. Machines were not simply small bands of greedy adventurers who formed rings but sophisticated, powerful, and permanent devices operated by a particular class of men who capitalized on the social and political circumstances of urban life. Mechanical imagery underscored this claim, pushing reform critiques away from a focus on individuals and toward structural explanations of urban political development.

The Mugwumps, who popularized the term, found it particularly congenial to the larger portrait of American politics they developed during the 1870s and 1880s. Liberal reformers constructed a detached, social scientific analysis of the sources and character of Gilded Age public life. Critics such as Godkin and Bryce did not reject moral analysis in favor of an ethically neutral stance, but they attributed moral differences and moral failure to evolutionary patterns that had shaped groups rather than simply to individual character. This shift did not lead Mugwumps to portray democratic politics as a contest among groups with separate but equally valid interests. But it did encourage them to imagine urban public life as a clash of cultures, a step that would help pave the way for a fuller political pluralism.

Social scientific analysis fueled by Darwinism was a core element of liberal reform. Many of the Mugwumps whose writings would define machine politics were closely tied to the professionalization of the social sciences after the Civil War. They helped found such bodies as the American Social Science Association, which spearheaded early efforts at civil service reform, and its offshoots, such as the American Economic Association. Influenced by evolutionary theory and the profound cultural shift it wrought, they used scientific language to explain social phenomena, including politics. William Graham Sumner, popularizer of Social Darwinism in the United States, was himself a key liberal reformer.[34] He argued that American democracy was a "transient stage in social evolution" and that urban machines and bosses were best understood in such a context. The boss, he argued, was "the product of a long process of natural selection" and the "natural outcome" of the evolution of American democratic institutions. Using less neutral language, civil service activist Dorman Eaton saw the rise of Tammany as evidence of the "degeneracy" of American urban democracy. The New York City machine, he declared, was the product of haphazard political breeding, the "mongrel union…between a charity society and a partisan faction for

office and spoils," a mixture that contained "conflicting elements of savagery and charity."[35]

Darwinism also supplied a racial reinforcement to the class implications of the machine metaphor. Although Sumner and Herbert Spencer, his Social Darwinist counterpart in England, used evolution to explain the growth of social institutions and practices rather than to classify individuals or groups in racial terms, popular usage was less precise. Depictions of the working class took on an increasingly racialized character during the late nineteenth century, and racial logic offered a means of explaining the gap between rich and poor. As Mathew Jacobson and other scholars examining the creation of "whiteness" have demonstrated, Gilded Age Americans imagined European immigrants in racial terms just as readily as they did blacks and Asians and assumed them incapable of republican citizenship. Mugwumps such as Godkin, who casually dismissed workers as "barbarians," played an important role in shaping this popular perspective. Thus when representations of machine politics emphasized the working-class character of party bosses, a racial hierarchy fueled by Darwinism underscored that claim.[36]

Visual depictions of bosses mixed class and racial features to mark them as an inferior type. New York prizefighter-turned-politician John Morrissey routinely received such treatment. *Puck*'s blend of class and racial elements was but one of many to depict him as a lower-class brute. An 1876 cartoon in *Harper's Weekly* dressed him in laborer's clothes, placed a shamrock in the background to highlight his ethnicity, added a gaudy jewel to evoke Thomas Nast's Tweed, and suggested evolutionary inferiority with a protruding jaw and heavy brow (Figure 6). Simian portrayals of the Irish which had served as a background element in Nast's art became standard elements of Gilded Age cartoons, now used to signify the racial character of leading politicians themselves rather than merely their rank-and-file supporters. During the 1890s, cartoons of Tammany boss Richard Croker combined class and racial symbols. A *New York Press* image depicted him as a racialized Gulliver, with a heavy brow and hairy knuckles signifying his evolutionary status while a garish checked coat reminded readers of his class origins. The oversized diamond on his shirtfront completed the picture with another reminder of Tweed (Figure 7).[37]

One of the more successful representations of machine politicians in these terms during the Gilded Age was Rufus Shapley's satirical novel *Solid for Mulhooly.* Shapley, a supporter of Philadelphia Republican William Stokely, published the book anonymously in 1880. It traced the origins and rise of Michael Mulhooly, a corrupt Irish politician active in an unnamed party set in the "Tenth District" of an unnamed city. Shapley intended *Mulhooly* as a thinly veiled attack on Stokely's rival and fellow boss James McManes. Despite these partisan intentions, Philadelphia's leading liberal reform group, the Committee of One

FIGURE 6. John Morrissey as a simian, lower-class boxer. A dismayed Samuel Tilden looks on. *Harper's Weekly,* September 23, 1876.

Hundred, quickly seized on the book and turned it into a reform document. They hired Professor S. K. Murdoch, a well-known "elocutionist," to read the book publicly on the eve of the February 1881 municipal election. By the time reformers brought out a second edition in 1889, citing popular demand, it had

FIGURE 7. A hairy-fisted Richard Croker, as depicted in the *New York Press. American Monthly Review of Reviews* 16 (November 1897): 540.

become a general reform tract divorced of any connection to its origins in a Philadelphia factional dispute. A new preface billed the book as "an attempt to give a picture of 'the Machine' calculated to help those who denounce 'boss rule,'" and the publishers included extracts from newspaper reviews that stressed its success

as a satire on behalf of municipal reform. These additions furthered blurred the story's origins and helped make it a satiric account of a more general problem instead of an attack on a specific politician.[38]

Shapley blended class and racial elements in constructing Mulhooly and the political milieu in which he operated. Social markers abounded: Mulhooly had no education save for time spent in a local saloon, where he learned to read by examining the sporting news; the distinction between supporters of the machine and "respectable" people is sustained throughout the book; and Mulhooly's dialogue and that of his colleagues was rendered in an ungrammatical working-class vernacular and with an Irish accent. Shapley also placed racial characteristics in the foreground. The first chapter of the book examined Mulhooly's "antecedents" and included a sketch by Thomas Nast (who illustrated the second edition) that referenced his "Paddy-Cree" as well as a set of playing cards illustrated with apelike Irish faces. Irish names littered the book, invariably as participants in and supporters of the corrupt, ignorant politics that characterized the machine.[39]

Nast's role in the new edition highlights the changes that had occurred since 1871 in how reformers explained machine politics. Undoubtedly intended to link the Mulhooly character to the ur-boss Tweed, Nast's depiction of Mulhooly evoked his most famous cartoons but also emphasized class and racial features absent in his representations of the Tweed Ring members. The frontispiece of the book featured a portrait of corpulent, gaudily dressed Mulhooly holding a damaged ballot box and glaring at the reader (Figure 8). In case anyone missed the link to his real-life predecessor, Mulhooly wore an oversized diamond pin on his chest, and a portrait of Tweed hung on the wall in the background, complete with the famous phrase, "What are you going to do about it?" But Nast departed from his Tweed cartoons in significant ways. Whereas the images of the Tweed Ring focused on specific characters, Mulhooly was a type. His short, bristly haircut and garish checked pants signaled his less than respectable, working-class character. His heavy brow and protruding jaw suggested a social difference that was less a matter of style than of biology. Explained in part by Mulhooly's fictional status, Nast's use of these markers nevertheless underscores the growing effort to define machine politicians and explain their corruption in social rather than purely moral terms.

Solid for Mulhooly's satirical portrait of boss rule was one of many efforts to explain the origins and character of machine politics put forth during the late nineteenth century. Indeed, such analyses became a cottage industry of sorts. They alluded to the character failings of party bosses but paid more attention to the social and political conditions under which machine politics had evolved. While their purpose was to promote a better understanding of the machine so it could be eliminated, these examinations had unintended effects. They moved

FIGURE 8. Michael Mulhooly: fictionalized, brutish ward boss. Rufus Edmonds Shapley's *Solid for Mulhooly: A Political Satire,* new edition with original illustrations by Thomas Nast (Philadelphia: Gebbie, 1889).

municipal reform away from expressions of moral outrage to more analytical explanations of why machine politics arose and what to do about it.

These less indignant, more analytical explanations of the machine also inched toward pluralism. None claimed that the machine method was a justifiable way

of engaging in politics. But in presenting a social scientific interpretation of machine success, they opened up room for explanations of group behavior that attributed to workers and immigrants distinctive sets of values and priorities. Investigators did not accord these beliefs legitimacy, but in asserting that such differences existed, they laid the groundwork for the redefinition of urban public life as a process of balancing competing, equally legitimate group interests.

Among the most suggestive of these commentaries was an essay by Theodore Roosevelt in the November 1886 issue of *The Century.* Then a young New York City Republican running for mayor, Roosevelt would finish a disappointing third, behind both Democrat Abram Hewitt and labor candidate Henry George. In his article, "Machine Politics in New York City," Roosevelt offered advice to liberal reformers about how to defeat Tammany and organizations like it. His intriguing analysis pointed the way toward the masculine, pluralistic approach to politics that would characterize his public career.

Roosevelt framed his essay as an introduction to a still poorly understood political development. He proposed to explain how "the organizations commonly known as machines" worked and "why the word machine has come to be used to a certain extent as a term of opprobrium." The purpose of such a portrait was to guide reformers in how best to combat this new kind of politics. The essay was subdivided into discussions of why good citizens tolerated machines, their structure, the duties of party workers (or "heelers"), the role of liquor dealers, and "boss methods," before closing with a primer on "beating the machine." It was possible, he admitted, that the proper use of these institutions would redound to the public benefit, but for the most part they did not, because the men who ran them were animated only by a concern for private gain and cared little for the public good.[40]

To convey the necessity of such an investigation, Roosevelt employed language that suggested complexity and universality. Machines were "singularly perfect" organizations that worked with "clockwork regularity." Writing for a national audience, Roosevelt insisted that in spite of the article's New York focus, the problems he described were more than merely a local phenomenon. Machines were developing in all the nation's great cities because the diversity and anonymity of metropolitan life created the conditions in which they flourished. The division of the essay into multiple parts devoted to different facets of machine activity underscored the intricacy of its inner workings.[41]

Citing his firsthand experience as a practicing politician, Roosevelt argued that machine supporters could not be dismissed as simply unintelligent. He admitted that "the moral and mental attitudes toward politics assumed by different sections of voters" was the chief obstacle to good government and that many of them were "densely ignorant." But he also asserted that workers "not unnaturally"

supported politicians who promised better working and living conditions. The working class, he claimed, would support the side "which it believes inclines to right." Lower-class voters were not merely dupes in this telling; however faulty their reasoning, they had concluded that the machine served their individual and collective interests better than the alternative did. Likewise, Roosevelt concluded that most machine operatives worked for the organization not simply for pecuniary reasons but because of a "real feeling of allegiance" to the party and because they were supporting "what they believe to be right."[42]

Implicit in these assertions was an acknowledgment of moral heterogeneity. "Different sections of voters" had different understandings of what was right and how politics and government should operate. Roosevelt stopped short of according these understandings full legitimacy. Lower-class voters were "very emotional," he declared, and were too easily swayed by sentiment or acts of kindness. They also lacked perspicacity: "The great class of laboring men, mostly of foreign birth or parentage," he argued, "expect too much from legislation and yet at the same time realize too little how powerfully though indirectly they are affected by bad or corrupt government." In other instances he cast doubt on their rationality, suggesting that they ignored corruption among politicians "so long as these charges do not imply betrayal of their own real or fancied interests." Yet even with these caveats, Roosevelt was advancing an explanation of machine politics that departed in important ways from the one that prevailed during the Tweed era. Bosses and machines succeeded not simply because of their corruption but because they responded to the demands and concerns of the immigrant proletariat, a group with distinctive expectations of politics and government. If these expectations were not to be accorded full respect, they nevertheless had to be acknowledged.[43]

Just as voters displayed a different political ethic, so too did the politicians who served them. Politicians were their own class, "knit together" by common social experiences and relations. Many of them worked "disinterestedly" in support of the party organization, Roosevelt contended, in much the same way other men might "devote their time and money to advancing the interests of a yacht club or racing stable." (Such comparisons also suggested the essay's intended audience.) Roosevelt noted in particular the "frank" testimony of one politician who, though ignorant, was truthful enough to "tell things as they were" in public. "It evidently had never occurred to him," the essay stated, "that he was not expected by everyone to do just as he had been doing, that is, to draw a large salary for himself, to turn over a still larger fund to his party allies, and conscientiously to endeavor, as far as he could, by the free use of his time and influence, to satisfy the innumerable demands made upon him by the various small-fry politicians." Leaving aside the statement's condescension, which served to bind the author and his bourgeois readers, it highlighted the degree to which politicians operated

from a different ethical standard. Though that code was unacceptable among respectable citizens, it presented the motive force driving machine politics as something more than mere self-aggrandizement.[44]

Roosevelt's relatively tolerant depiction of the machine served his ultimate purpose: to persuade reformers to copy his methods. Developing a critique that many observers would later duplicate, he claimed that reformers had been ineffectual because machine politicians made a business of political life. Professional politicians had the same advantages as "regular soldiers have when matched against militia men." Defeating the machine required "sheer hard work" by "active, energetic men" ready to engage in a fierce "political struggle."[45]

This heavily masculine, conflict-oriented language underscored a key Roosevelt complaint, one that echoed the laments of liberal reformers. Well-to-do citizens concentrated too much on their private lives and interests, content to let disreputable men run politics for their own benefit. It was necessary for good men to leave the feminine sanctuary of the home and to join the male realm of public action. In short, they had to act in the manly fashion of machine politicians. Employing themes that he would articulate throughout his public career, Roosevelt sought to reverse the gendered assumptions about party politics and reform that politicians were using so skillfully against liberal reformers during the Gilded Age.[46]

In calling for privately oriented citizens to enter the masculine arena of public action, Roosevelt also pushed reformers toward greater recognition of heterogeneity as a fact of urban political life. Near the close of his essay he recounted his own success in "drilling a little sense into decent people" and defeating Tammany in his district. "This was done by some twenty or thirty young fellows who devoted a large part of their time thoroughly to organizing and getting out the respectable vote." These were "all active and energetic men, with common sense, whose motives were perfectly disinterested." What distinguished their efforts, along with sufficient masculine vigor, was "absolute freedom from caste spirit." This organization included a professor, a college athlete, an "Irish quarryman," a master carpenter, a "rich young merchant," the owner of a small cigar store, the editor of a "little German newspaper," and several post office and customs-house employees. A Jew, a Presbyterian, and a Catholic constituted a key committee within the organization. A sense of fraternal fellowship rooted in masculinity bound these disparate men together and helped make a successful reform campaign possible. For Roosevelt, this fraternalist, pluralistic formula, which he would later use to describe the Rough Riders, was the key to restoring good city government in socially diverse cities.[47]

Roosevelt was a staunch Republican partisan rather than a liberal reformer himself. Though he sought to influence the thinking of Mugwumps and their

allies, his essay was a critique of their methods. A better reflection of liberal reform thought was James Bryce's landmark study, *The American Commonwealth.* With the exception of Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America,* Bryce's study was perhaps the most perceptive and influential examination of American public life by a foreign observer. The result of three extended visits to the United States and a voluminous correspondence, *The American Commonwealth* provided a thorough and perceptive discussion of the democratic institutions of the United States and was filled with prescient insights. Bryce sought comments from Roosevelt on a draft of the book and cited his essay when discussing city politics. But the Englishman's thinking was influenced much more heavily by Mugwumps themselves, most notably E. L. Godkin, with whom he corresponded regularly. He expressed their conception of urban public life, employing the same neutral, social scientific style that liberal reformers favored. His account also reflected the same shift toward a more pluralistic understanding of big-city public life evident in Roosevelt's essay.

Bryce was the quintessential Victorian gentleman, physically vigorous, intellectually cultivated, and politically engaged. An internationally acclaimed mountain climber as a young man, he became a respected historian, was elected a member of Parliament, and later served as British ambassador to the United States. He undertook his in-depth examination of American public life because, like Tocqueville and so many other Europeans, he saw his own civilization evolving along the democratic lines already evident across the Atlantic. He came to the United States in part to learn how to avoid the problems associated with mass democracy, a perspective that aligned him with his Mugwump informants, although he remained an admirer of the young nation and its people throughout his life.[48]

Bryce began observing the nation's public life closely in 1870. Among his experiences was a visit to the New York State Democratic Convention of that year, where he watched the Tweed Ring manipulate the process and claim control of the state government. He also met many of the men who would become the leaders of the liberal reform movement in the United States, including Godkin, *Nation* cofounder Henry Villard, George William Curtis, and Carl Schurz. He returned to the United States for more extensive study and travel in 1881 and again in 1883, when he took a tour of the West accompanied by Godkin.[49]

The American Commonwealth proved to be both a quick success and an enduring, influential study. It first appeared in England in 1888, and the initial American edition came out the following year. Reviews were positive and demand for the book accelerated. By 1910 it had sold 212,000 copies, and it remained "mandatory reading in most colleges and universities" for forty years after publication. It was this audience—the educated classes generally—that Bryce most hoped to reach and to influence. But there is evidence that his study had an even

wider impact. Publicity agents promoting one of Bryce's U.S. lecture tours after the book's publication reported, with only modest hyperbole, that Bryce's name had become a "household word." When Bryce became British ambassador to the United States in 1907, he was an enormously well known and popular figure, in large part because of the success of *The American Commonwealth*.[50]

It was among reformers that the book had its warmest reception. When fellow English visitors Bertrand Russell and Beatrice Webb toured the United States during the 1890s, they found that Bryce was "incessantly quoted by reform elements." This is hardly surprising since these same people had served as Bryce's principal informants. Although Bryce later claimed that he "talked to everybody I could find in the United States, not only to statesmen in the halls of Congress, not only at dinner parties, but in the decks of steamers, in smoking cars, to drivers of wagons upon western prairies, to ward politicians and city bosses," it was a small circle of liberal reformers who shaped his understanding of American public life. He relied particularly on Godkin, though he chose not to acknowledge that help because he feared the book would be dismissed as just another Mugwump tract.[51]

Godkin's influence was especially evident in Bryce's account of urban party politics. Like Godkin, Bryce eschewed expressions of moral outrage for a more careful analysis of the roots of municipal corruption. Diverse cities offered "the best soil for [the] growth" of boss politics, he argued. His rationale in support of that claim precisely followed that offered in the pages of the *Nation*. Along with frequent elections, numerous offices, and universal suffrage, three factors fueled municipal misrule: "a vast population of ignorant immigrants," the fact that the bulk of the "leading men" in each city were "intensely occupied with business," and "communities so large that people know little of one another, and that the interest of each individual in good government is comparatively small."[52]

Bryce also used evolutionary concepts to frame his analysis. Machine politics resembled nothing so much as ancient tribal or feudal relations. "The bond between the party chiefs and their followers is very close and very seldom broken," he wrote. "What the client was to his patron at Rome, what the vassal was to his lord in the Middle Ages, that the 'heelers' and 'workers' are to their Boss in these great transatlantic cities." Just as Godkin had placed Irish voters in the clan stage of politics, so Bryce located the ethos of urban party politics in the distant past. Machines were a feudal remnant, brought to the United States by peasants from a culture that had not yet evolved sufficiently to generate independent citizens capable of functioning in a representative democracy.[53]

In this context, machine politics became the product of a separate moral realm. It was not enough to condemn party politicians for rejecting or ignoring prevailing ethical precepts. They were operating within a distinctive code.

Machine politicians were not "wicked men," Bryce insisted, but were better understood as "the offspring of a system" whose "morality" was "that of their surroundings." Class and ethnic origins explained the behavior of party bosses: "A city boss is often of foreign birth and humble origin; he has grown up in an atmosphere of oaths and cocktails; ideas of honour and purity are as strange to him as ideas about the nature of the currency and the incidence of taxation." "Even city politicians," he added, "must have a moral code and moral standard. It is not the code of an ordinary unprofessional citizen. It does not forbid falsehood, or malversation, or ballot stuffing, or 'repeating.' But it denounces apathy or cowardice, disobedience, and above all treason to the party."[54]

In effect, Bryce, like Roosevelt, argued that the United States had more than one political culture. Neither observer was prepared to place the code of the machine politician on an equal footing with bourgeois Victorian morality. The machine ethos was clearly inferior. It stemmed from ancient feudal and clan traditions that were inadequate and inappropriate in a modern urban-industrial society. But both claimed that respectable reformers and party politicians operated from separate ethical codes rooted in specific social contexts, a recognition that constituted a first, inadvertent step toward imagining American politics in heterogeneous terms.

One can see how Bryce's analysis pointed toward pluralism by considering the ideas of another foreign observer of American public life, Moisei Ostrogorski. The Russian-born, French-trained Ostrogorski produced a two-volume study of English and American politics, *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties*, which appeared in French and English in 1902. Though published after the turn of the century, the second volume of Ostrogorski's book relied on research conducted in the United States during the 1890s. He consulted many of the same liberal reformers as Bryce, though Ostrogorski likely spoke with a wider range of people. The Russian scholar also shared many assumptions with his English counterpart, most notably his belief in the desirability of elite leadership as a counterweight to mass democracy. But Ostrogorski departed from Bryce on the fundamental nature of American politics, which he deemed an extension of profit-oriented business values, and on the character of reformers, whom he treated as representatives of class interests rather than as stewards of the public good.[55]

Since he was interested in modern parties, Ostrogorski spent considerable time investigating their most obvious manifestation, urban political machines. He devoted two full chapters of volume 2 to "the Politicians and the Machine" and significant portions of another to municipal reform, drawing on his own observations as well as extensive interviews. He provided detailed discussions of how party organizations operated in urban settings and how politicians provided

a wide range of services and benefits to their constituents. He concluded that immigrant and working-class voters were far from ignorant dupes. Instead, they were rational, self-interested actors who derived specific benefits from politics and politicians.

Ostrogorski insisted that this kind of clientelist politics arose in part from the plural context in which city politics operated. "In the popular wards of the large cities the small politician has no need to create the political following which he forms around him," the Russian reported. "He finds it ready to hand in social life, in which neighbourly ties, and above all common tastes and mutual sympathies, give rise to small sets, groups of people who meet regularly to enjoy the pleasures of sociability and friendship." These "small sets" of people provided local politicians with prefabricated clusters of voters to use as a base of political support. They needed only to provide whatever benefits and recognition their supporters desired to earn their loyalty. Better yet, if a politician was a member of one of these groups, he could ensure himself of even firmer devotion.[56]

It was a mistake that reformers often made to assume that such an approach to politics was simply immoral. Politicians, Ostrogorski argued in an echo of Bryce's claims, operated from their own moral understanding. "Far from being depraved men, the politicians profess rather a clan morality," he insisted, "which is often in opposition with the morality of society at large." Though he labeled this clan morality "perverted," it nevertheless justified politicians' conduct and that of their supporters. The same calculation applied to voters who backed the machine. "The lower-class elector still judges everything by the standard of private morality," Ostrogorski explained. Such men were "as yet incapable of rising to the height of social morality." It was this "primitive morality of the masses" that "deliver[ed] them into the hands of the machine."[57]

The evolutionary perspective Ostrogorski offered did not distinguish him from Bryce or from liberal reformers who criticized machine politics in these terms. But he took his analysis a step further. Instead of assuming that reformers had achieved this heightened "social morality," he argued that they were pursuing their own selfish interests. Professions of devotion to the public good disguised reformers' attempts to defend propertied interests against the depredations of politicians who represented those without property. The civic reform leagues that formed to overthrow machine rule worked "to bind together the 'classes,' not exactly against the 'masses' as such, but against the 'masses' who let themselves be exploited by the plundering politicians."[58]

This argument rested on two premises that differentiated Ostrogorski from Mugwump critics of machine politics. Though he shared the popular faith in the best men as natural rulers, he did not think the United States had enough of

them to govern. American culture was overrun by acquisitiveness. Party politics merely reflected the larger national obsession with profit. Businessmen, professionals, and other well-to-do Americans aimed to enrich themselves, not the commonweal. It was thus unsurprising to find that party machines often served the interests of business, both by delivering helpful legislation and by keeping the masses satiated. Only when the machines failed to fulfill these duties, either by demanding too much in the form of bribery or by failing to control criminality, did reformers seriously challenge machine rule.[59]

It was in this treatment of reformers as just another interest that Ostrogorski departed from orthodox understandings of urban politics. He shared the liberal preference for elite rule, but he did not see in the United States a true elite of sufficient size and status to fill such a role. Instead, the businessmen and professionals who spearheaded reform campaigns were themselves an interest, one that required care and feeding by politicians in the same way that other groups, including immigrants and workers, did. Party politics in the United States, and especially in American cities, served to balance these interests and maintain the social order.

The significance of these arguments was not in their influence. Ostrogorski's book did not penetrate popular discourse in the manner that *The American Commonwealth* did. Nor was it well received by academic critics and reformers, overlapping constituencies who found its indictment of reformers and its treatment of machine politics incompatible with their own views. What Ostrogorski's assessment did was point out how the Mugwump analysis could be taken a step further toward a pluralistic understanding of urban public life. Approaching machine politics as an expression of group interest opened the way toward approaching reform in the same terms. Ostrogorski was neither the first nor the most important observer to make such a claim. But his connections with liberal reformers and his employment of so many of their assumptions make his conclusions an object lesson in the implications of the social analysis of city politics that they offered.

Perhaps the best indication of how Mugwumps helped usher in pluralism is a consideration of E. L. Godkin's changing approach to reform. In the immediate aftermath of the Tweed scandal, Godkin used Darwinian logic to challenge universal suffrage. But when that approach bore no fruit, he shifted to a more openly class-based politics that at least tacitly acknowledged the presence of competing group interests within the body politic. Though he rejected Ostrogorski's argument that reformers did not speak solely for the common good, Godkin recognized that urban politics had become a competition among divergent political forces professing different understandings of how public life should operate. Acting on that idea, he engaged in efforts to mobilize support for reform along class lines, an implicit admission of social heterogeneity.

The context for that acknowledgment was a resurgent campaign against Tammany during the 1890s. After the failure of the Tilden Commission's plan to restrict suffrage, Godkin paid less attention to municipal politics, save for an occasional editorial in the *Nation*. But he returned to the battle against Tammany in the 1890s, spurred by a larger anti-machine insurgency that included sensational investigations of the relations between the machine, the police, and the vice industry conducted by Rev. Charles Parkhurst and the subsequent revelations of the Lexow Committee, an investigation by state legislatures into Tammany-sponsored police corruption. Godkin's chief contribution to that campaign was a series of "Tammany Biographies" for the *Evening Post* in early 1890. Updated and republished as a pamphlet for the next two rounds of city elections, *Tammany Biographies* became a key tool in the assault that defeated Tammany in 1894.[60]

Godkin was more concerned with the behavior of the "intelligent class" than he was with the activities of working-class immigrants or their tribunes. "That the presence of a large body of ignorant foreign voters makes good government in New York more difficult, there is no denying," he acknowledged, "but it does not necessarily or readily hand over the control of the city to such a set of people as compose the Executive Committee of the Tammany Society." For that, Godkin blamed "the better class of voters," who tolerated a massively corrupt public life. He was particularly frustrated with the party habits that split upper- and middle-class voters and allowed Tammany to carry the city. The insistence of the Republican leadership on nominating candidates for mayor during the 1880s, even when a reform candidate was on the ballot, divided the votes of the respectable classes and allowed the machine to win.[61]

Following the logic of this analysis, Godkin turned his attention to mobilizing the "decent and industrious" people of New York against Tammany. He had already sought such an end during the 1870s, but he set about gaining it in different fashion during the 1890s. Attempts to limit the voting public to one class were no longer feasible, and his Darwinian views provided little sustenance for the idea of forging a consensus across lines of race and class in a city such as New York. Even structural changes in municipal government were unlikely to improve matters as long as voting strength remained lodged in the hands of untutored immigrants. To solve the problem, he concluded, required mobilizing one segment of the population, the middle class, against another, the pro-Tammany immigrant working class. The means to this end was publicity, and Godkin sought to expand his audience well beyond the narrow circle of readers that the *Nation* and other Mugwump journals reached.

Tammany Biographies constituted the fullest implementation of this strategy. Written partly in response to an 1889 *Harper's Weekly* article on "the new Tammany" which portrayed the machine's leaders as upright, trustworthy, entirely

respectable politicians, this series of short sketches aimed to counter that impression in the public mind. In style, substance, and distribution they represented a departure for Godkin. Focusing on the connections of Tammany's Executive Committee members to gambling, prostitution, liquor dealing, and violent crime, the biographies followed some of the conventions that would come to define muckraking a decade later. Journalism historian Frank Luther Mott described them as "racy in style, ruthless in exposure." A pamphlet version of *Tammany Biographies* came out on the eve of the 1890 municipal election, shortly after the biographies' initial publication in the *Evening Post*. At five cents a copy, a price only slightly higher than that of some newspapers, they were clearly designed to reach a broad audience and shape mass opinion. Republication followed in the weeks leading up to the 1892 and 1894 elections, with editorial changes designed to make the new editions up-to-date. A whirlwind of publicity surrounded them and Godkin when they were first published, and they sparked numerous lawsuits by offended Tammanyites.[62]

Although critical of the yellow journalism that was spreading at the time, Godkin was not averse to a degree of sensationalism himself. *Tammany Biographies* contained blow-by-blow accounts of murders and fistfights and revelations of the intimate ties between public officials and known criminals. Boss Richard Croker's profile included his various scrapes with the law, among them a clash that led to charges of murder against him and another fight that cost his opponent an ear. Eleventh District leader John J. Scannell "began his political life by committing a murder in a gambling house at Twenty-Eighth Street and Broadway, where pools were being sold on elections," Godkin reported. There was a detailed description of how County Clerk Henry Purroy broke the jaw of a political opponent during a local Democratic convention and the breathless revelation that Eighth District leader Bernard Martin ran the "Burnt Rag" saloon with "Red" Leary, the "most notorious burglar in the country," and his wife, Kate, the "most famous pickpocket in the world."[63]

The sketches also stressed the lower-class origins of the men who ran Tammany Hall. A breakdown of the profiles in the 1894 edition revealed four professional gamblers, five former gambling house operators, nine current or former liquor dealers, two sons of liquor dealers, and two "nominal" lawyers. "Few of them can write an English note with any approach to correctness," the collection's introduction haughtily declared. Mayor Hugh Grant's biography noted gratuitously that he had been raised by a pawnbroker. Croker's sketch reported that he was "a tough in his younger years," and Tim Sullivan was "a typical fourth ward tough" who engaged in street brawls. Most of the sketches referred to the subject's nickname in the manner of a police report: Patrick Diver was "commonly called 'Paddy'"; Philip Wissig was "known as 'Foul-Mouthed Phil'"; and

even Mayor Grant was "familiarly known among his political associates as Hughey."[64]

This emphasis on class reflected the precise political purpose of *Tammany Biographies*. It contained few specific charges of corruption, and none of them was new. The collection's purpose was to foment class resentment and to mobilize voters on that basis. Readers could share in the sense of superiority encouraged by the use of nicknames, the discussion of family backgrounds, and the mocking employment of working-class vernacular ("de organization"). As Godkin explained in a *Nation* editorial that accompanied their publication, the biographies were designed to reach "that portion of the community which follows honest callings," which he believed would not "accept with eyes open a municipal administration composed of men taken largely from the class of criminal or shiftless adventurers."[65]

The significance of Godkin's engagement with urban political reform during the 1890s stems less from its influence than its methods. *Tammany Biographies* alone did not spark a middle-class insurgency. Only with the Parkhurst investigation and the revelations of the Lexow Committee, both of which also aimed to stoke bourgeois outrage, did the groundswell of support for reform grow powerful enough to defeat Tammany. And even that victory was short-lived; the machine regained control of city hall two years later. But by the 1890s Godkin's attempts to spur a municipal reform insurgency signaled that even Mugwumps operated on the premise that the public was divided. That shift helped usher in a recognizably modern political life characterized by mass appeals designed to mobilize specific segments of the public on the basis of class, race, ethnicity, and other categories.

Elite liberal reformers were not the only or even the primary agents of this reconception of American democracy. In many respects, they were responding to the claims of workers, immigrants, and party politicians. But their capacity for propagating their ideas was unsurpassed, and their acknowledgment, however inadvertent, of the multiple, divergent interests active in American public life was significant. It would remain for a later generation of reformers, intellectuals, politicians, and grassroots activists to ascribe equal legitimacy to the competing sets of interests, agendas, and values evident in Gilded Age cities. The Mugwumps' implicit recognition of that diversity encouraged the idea of a plural politics on which the machine ethos rested.

The rise of the machine metaphor also intersected with other political developments that furthered the popular acceptance of pluralism. The most significant was the development of aggressive labor parties. By representing urban party politics as machine politics, Mugwumps gave boss rule distinct class

connotations. That association would grow all the more powerful and, for many, all the more alarming when workingmen's parties launched a serious bid for municipal power during the late 1880s. Approaches to municipal reform that arrayed a unified public against a few corrupt politicians became even less persuasive as urban class cleavages grew more obvious. In that context the machine metaphor resonated all the more powerfully and the sense of political difference it evoked became all the more established.

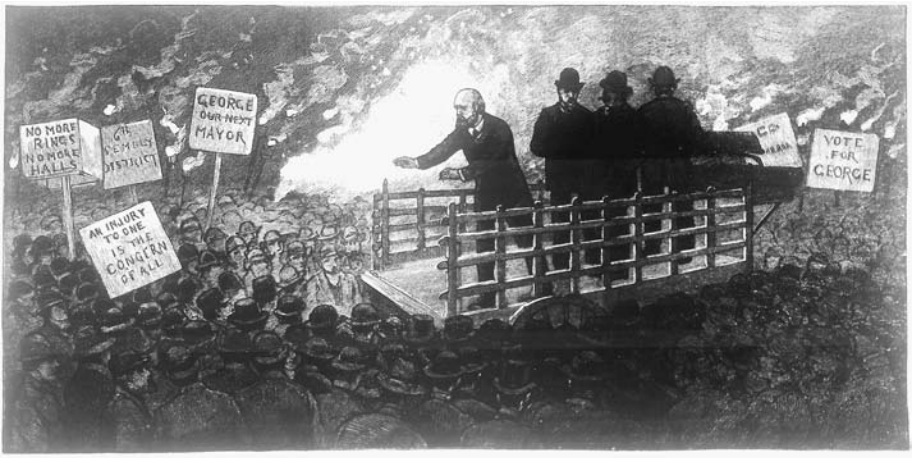
3

LABOR'S REPUBLIC LOST

The Workingmen's Insurgency and Class Politics in the Gilded Age City

Workers, declared the Chicago labor editor Andrew Cameron in 1867, "must guard the gates of the Republic and declare to the world that it is a Workingman's Government, and that millions of workingmen and women will bare their right arms to preserve and protect it as such." During the decades that followed the Civil War, labor activists would strive to live up to Cameron's declaration. They argued that the social and economic changes wrought by industrialization threatened American democracy, and they imagined themselves as a bulwark against corruption and civic decline. Though hesitant to undertake independent political action during the 1860s and 1870s, workingmen's advocates finally set aside such doubts during the Great Upheaval, a series of strikes, boycotts, and labor protests that convulsed the nation during the second half of the 1880s. Spurred on by the rapid ascent of the Knights of Labor as a national organization, they organized labor parties in cities around the country and briefly attempted to form a national party behind land reformer Henry George in 1887. These efforts constituted what Leon Fink has labeled "the American worker's single greatest push for political power."[1]

The labor activists and rank-and-file workers who launched this campaign framed their efforts chiefly in Cameron's terms. They imagined themselves as defenders of a republican order from the assaults of predatory capitalists. The assertion of working-class rights and power, they believed, would stymie the efforts of the handful of wealthy, would-be aristocrats who sought to bend the state to their will. Workers, they argued, represented the people's interests, and



NEW YORK CITY.—THE MAYORALTY CAMPAIGN—A HENRY GEORGE MEETING ON THE EAST SIDE.

FIGURE 9. Henry George campaigning as the nominee for mayor of the United Labor Party in 1886. Much of George's campaign took place on city streets rather than in the traditional corridors of political power. He finished a strong second, prompting a wave of enthusiasm for workingmen's politics in cities throughout the country. Though these efforts failed to transform urban public life as George and others hoped, they had enough success to strengthen labor's position as a political interest. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper,* October 30, 1886.

a successful labor mobilization would provide the counterweight necessary to preserve a democratic republic within the new industrial order.

The workingmen's insurgency of the 1880s did not achieve that goal, at least not in the manner the labor activists anticipated. Labor parties met with some initial success at the municipal level, with notable victories in Chicago, Cincinnati, and Milwaukee and a near miss in New York City. But they faded quickly, unable to lure enough workers away from mainstream parties or to convince enough middle-class voters that they represented reform rather than revolution. Rhetoric about "bared arms" and the creation of a "Workingman's Government," often trumpeted by labor's opponents, held in it enough hints of proletarian revolt to prompt such fears. Ideological and social divisions within the labor movement weakened its efforts as well. With the failure of labor's campaign during the 1880s, the last substantial hopes for a urban civic order defined by labor's republican vision of social, economic, and political equality disappeared.

Unable to act as saviors of the republic, workers and their advocates nevertheless claimed a place at the public table. The voting power that workers demonstrated during the 1880s and the threat of radicalism, real or imagined—conveyed in both militant statements by labor partisans and dire warnings from opponents—spurred politicians and reformers to treat them as an important

constituency. Doing so was an implicit admission that class mattered and that workers had a distinctive and legitimate set of interests. Labor's hopes for a workers' republic were lost during the 1880s, but its position as an important interest in a plural political order was enhanced considerably. More broadly, a vision of politics as the art of balancing the claims of competing social groups gained further credence as it became clear to both workers and everyone else that labor was one of many interests that politicians had to accommodate.[2]

The burst of insurgent labor politics was short-lived. After two decades of fits and starts, the effort to organize workers into political parties suddenly gained momentum during the mid-1880s, fueled by increased industrial conflict and the unexpected success of the Knights of Labor, which won concessions from major employers in 1884 and 1885. By one count, the Knights and other labor groups formed new political parties in 189 cities and towns between 1886 and 1888. Though initial results in several big cities were promising, these new organizations faded quickly. Only 59 of them captured any offices at all, and most soon succumbed to internal bickering and the gravitational pull of the major parties.[3]

Intensifying dissatisfaction among American workers furthered these campaigns. During the decades following the Civil War the economy of the United States underwent an extraordinary transformation, even greater than the reconfiguration Americans experienced before the war. Manufacturing operations expanded and became more mechanized, firms grew larger, markets became national and international, economic swings grew sharper, and workers—relatively few masters and journeymen remained—lost most of the control they had maintained over the workplace and work itself. Wage laborers found themselves at the mercy of economic cycles, employers' whims, and seasonal rhythms, experiences that instilled an increasingly sharp sense of grievance.

The most wrenching of these changes occurred in larger cities. Early industrialization in the United States had been centered in rural or smaller urban settings such as Lowell, Massachusetts, partly to mitigate against the corrosive effects many believed it would have on the social and civic order. But large-scale manufacturing gained greater acceptance after the Civil War, and more employers opened factories in bigger cities with larger supplies of cheap labor. Between 1870 and 1900 manufacturing employment grew 254 percent in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, while growth in smaller settings slowed. Class differences were often more pronounced in metropolitan communities as well. In small cities and towns, employers and employees were more often bound together in a web of social relationships, connections that were absent amid the anonymity of the metropolis. As a result, strikes, boycotts, protests, and at times violence became defining elements of big-city life during the Gilded Age.[4]

Such class conflict sharpened noticeably during the 1880s. By that time the shift to large-scale industrial manufacturing was well along in many sectors of the American economy and workers' grievances had multiplied dramatically. The number of strikes throughout the country increased steadily during the 1880s, rising from 474 in 1881 to more than 1,400 in 1886. The Knights of Labor, launched in Philadelphia in 1869 as a small fraternal organization for skilled workers, capitalized on the discontent, growing to more than 100,000 members by 1884. After several local Knights assemblies successfully blocked wage and employment cuts on railroads owned by robber baron Jay Gould in 1884 and 1885, the group's popularity soared, and membership jumped to more than 700,000 skilled and unskilled workers by 1886. The successful actions of the Knights also breathed new life into the movement for an eight-hour workday. The campaign for limited hours reached a peak when hundreds of thousands of workers staged mass demonstrations in cities and towns across the country on May 1, 1886. It was these newly energized workers who provided the backbone for the many labor parties that would spring up in 1886 and 1887.

Only with the eruption of labor conflict during the mid-1880s would independent labor politics gain traction. Failed attempts to launch workers' parties during the 1860s and 1870s had turned most union leaders away from politics, as did defeats in New York City during the early 1880s. Lassallean socialists in Chicago and New York were among the few groups that had consistently advocated the formation of a worker's party. The Knights of Labor had formally disavowed organized political action, although local assemblies were free to support candidates from one or the other party and often did so. When a surge of strikes and boycotts followed by a repressive response from the state during the mid-1880s brought the question of political action to the fore, a labor movement divided into overlapping groups of socialists, trade unionists, and Knights was uncertain about whom it represented and what it wanted to accomplish. That lack of clarity would hamper the various labor and workingmen's parties that formed in cities across the country.[5]

Internal divisions and hesitancy were not the only problems facing labor politicians. The growth of class militancy in the United States had not gone unchallenged. The strikes and clashes of the postwar era had sparked fierce opposition, which only grew in response to the upsurge of activism during the mid-1880s. Anti-labor feeling crystallized after violence marred an anarchist protest in early May 1886 in Chicago's Haymarket Square. The anarchists had called for the demonstration on May 2 to protest police tactics during the previous day's mass demonstration in support of eight-hour legislation. At the second event, which attracted just a few hundred people, an explosion and police gunfire left at least fifteen people dead and scores more wounded. Although the source of the

explosion was unclear, anarchists received the blame and an anti-radical hysteria rapidly swept the city and the nation. Fears of impending class warfare, exploited skillfully by conservative businessmen and party politicians, created a difficult climate for labor insurgents. Opponents directly and implicitly linked labor activism with Chicago's anarchists and radicalism generally, putting the new parties on the defensive from the start.

Despite—and because of—the hostile political climate, labor leaders in cities and towns across the country quickly formed independent parties in 1886 and 1887. The decision to put aside doubts about independent politics occurred in large part because labor activists became convinced that their attempts to remake the industrial order were being stymied by party politicians beholden to business interests. They interpreted the excessive response to the Haymarket incident, along with the use of military forces to quell eight-hour demonstrations in Cincinnati and Milwaukee and the conviction of boycott organizers in New York City, in republican terms. These events proved that a few wealthy businessmen, in league with party bosses, controlled the government at the expense of ordinary citizens. In the face of such circumstances, the assumption that political change would flow from an economic transformation no longer worked. Most Knights and other laborites now concluded that political action was necessary to sustain a democratic republic and ensure an equitable society and economy.

Although calls for the formation of an independent party percolated through many cities during the spring of 1886, it was the stunning result of Henry George's bid for mayor of New York City during the autumn that galvanized labor politics. George did not win, but he finished a strong second as the candidate of the city's Central Labor Union (CLU) in a three-way race, capturing an impressive 68,000 votes. The winner, Democrat Abram Hewitt, received 90,000 votes while George outpolled the young Republican nominee, Theodore Roosevelt, by nearly 8,000 votes. That performance spurred the growth of labor parties in every major city over the following year. These campaigns—most notably in Chicago, Cincinnati, and Milwaukee—achieved enough momentum to feed a brief attempt at forming a national labor party with George at its head. But that effort made little headway, and most local parties fizzled almost as quickly as they arose.[6]

Sharpening class tensions in New York City had prompted George's candidacy. Fueled by the national success of the Knights as well as a growing number of local grievances, the city's workers staged 1,200 strikes in 1886. The most noteworthy actions were a series of streetcar strikes that sparked violence and badly disrupted daily life in the city. Membership in the CLU jumped to 180,000 workers, drawn from more than two hundred affiliate unions (up from just a few dozen in mid-1884). The increased numbers made it possible to stage boycotts of uncooperative shops and firms, a tactic that engaged a wider swath of

the working-class community and more directly challenged the concept of free markets. Boycotts drew the lines dividing classes even more clearly than strikes and represented a more radical threat to the prevailing economic order. They also recalled traditional forms of communal action, which meant that when local authorities began challenging them, most workers saw such prosecution as illegitimate.[7]

Prosecution of boycotters intensified during the spring and summer of 1886. Using conspiracy statutes, local authorities brought indictments against boycotters in more than one hundred cases. The final straw was the conviction of five men charged with organizing a boycott of Theiss's Music Hall. The defendants received harsh prison sentences, outraging local labor activists and convincing them of the fundamental corruption of public officials and the necessity of independent political action. It was this view that the state had undertaken unjust actions which generated a sense of crisis and returned New York workers to politics. Within two weeks of the sentencing, the CLU called a meeting of labor and radical groups to launch a workingmen's campaign in that fall's city elections.[8]

Once committed to political action, the CLU turned to Henry George, a noteworthy choice as the workingman's standard-bearer. A former printer and journalist in San Francisco, he had gained fame as the author of *Progress and Poverty* (1879), an indictment of the emerging social and economic order and its attendant inequality. Its chief proposal was the implementation of the single tax, a levy against profits made on unimproved land, which George contended was the key to solving most of the social and economic difficulties of industrial life. Moving to New York soon after the book's publication, George was hired by Patrick Ford, editor of the *Irish World*, who found his proposals for land reform applicable to Ireland as well as the United States. *Progress and Poverty* was not an immediate success, but it gained an audience when Ford produced an inexpensive edition.[9]

George was an attractive candidate for several reasons. Irish immigrants saw in his ideas a solution to the land-based inequities plaguing their home country. He had the support of labor spokesmen such as Terrence Powderly, of the Knights of Labor, who despite his reluctance to engage in independent politics saw in George's concern for land reform a plan that complemented the Knights' agenda. George was also unconnected to any of the ideological factions that comprised the Central Labor Union, making him acceptable to them all. And finally, George saw party politics as one of the chief obstacles to the implementation of land reform and had expressed his firm opposition to machine methods as early as 1882. Since a key part of the rationale for labor's reentry into politics was the belief that corrupt politicians did the bidding of businesses at the expense of workers, George's record aligned neatly with the CLU's concerns.[10]

George was nevertheless an imperfect choice as the tribune of labor. When approached by the delegates of the Central Labor Union about running for mayor during the summer of 1886, he agreed reluctantly, attracted more by the opportunity to publicize his single-tax idea than by his prospects for winning or a commitment to the labor movement. He was certainly sympathetic to the plight of workingmen, and his ideas about land reform were designed to solve the problem of inequality, but he was less concerned about providing immediate relief than with pushing for long-term change. "If I do go in," he confided to a friend as he considered his plans, "the campaign will bring the land question into practical politics and do more to popularize its discussion than years of writing could do. This is the only temptation for me."[11]

George finally agreed to run, but only after several weeks of private and public exchanges with CLU leaders. As a prerequisite to running, George asked that 30,000 voters sign a petition in support of his candidacy. The CLU complied, collecting 34,460 signatures, and he accepted the nomination on October 5. George was enough of a threat to persuade the city's Democratic factions to unite behind a single candidate, the wealthy and respectable Abram Hewitt. An ironmaster who had kept his mills open and his men employed during recessions, Hewitt was capable of attracting working-class support without alienating middle- and upper-class voters. The Democrats ran a fierce campaign, insisting that George was the candidate of radicals seeking to divide the community and foment class tensions, and asserting that they sought only to sustain harmony and cooperation between labor and capital. The Republicans nominated the young blueblood Theodore Roosevelt, who campaigned against both political corruption and socialism. He proved unable to make sufficient inroads among the working class, and the race ultimately turned on a clash between George and Hewitt.[12]

Although George did not win, the exciting and colorful campaign catapulted both him and the idea of an independent labor party to national prominence. He debated Hewitt, his chief rival, in a published correspondence that reviewed the major issues of the contest. But the most notable features of the campaign arose on the city streets, not in the pages of the mainstream press. From the initial effort to gather pledges of support for George's nomination to the 30,000 marchers who paraded through the rain on the Saturday before election day, the campaign took place outside the usual corridors of politics and power. On a typical night George traveled the city by horsecar, giving three or more speeches from the tailboard of a truck (Figure 9). On October 10 he addressed voters from a street corner in the Third Assembly District before moving to the Lower East Side for another outdoor rally and speech. He concluded the evening with a third address to a "mass meeting" of the United Pianomakers, who had gathered on West 44th Street. Such efforts were supplemented by neighborhood speakers

who kept local crowds engaged while waiting for an often-late George to arrive at a gathering, by parades and demonstrations, and by door-to-door and shop-by-shop pledge drives involving rank-and-file voters who ordinarily did not participate in politics to such an extent.[13]

Even in defeat, these efforts were enough to convince many workers of the viability of independent politics. Workingmen were "exultant" over George's vote total. Samuel Gompers, leader of the city's cigar makers and a skeptic about both George's prospects and plans for independent labor politics, nevertheless declared George's showing a "wonderful result." On election night George himself congratulated his supporters on "the greatest of victories that we have won." New York labor activists immediately went to work on the creation of a permanent United Labor Party (ULP), both in the city and nationally. George's campaign helped inspire and unite feuding factions in many cities and made the prospect of an independent labor party seem realistic.[14]

Official efforts to suppress labor activism triggered productive labor insurgencies in Chicago, Milwaukee, and Cincinnati as well. In Chicago, where anger over the events at Haymarket Square had intensified efforts to build a workers' organization, the local United Labor Party elected seven state representatives, five judges, and a state senator in November 1886. A day after the Haymarket violence, state militia men in Milwaukee shot and killed demonstrators at the Bay View Rolling Mills steel foundry. A local court subsequently convicted the demonstration's organizers of conspiracy while exonerating the shooters, an outcome that infuriated local workers and led to the rapid ascent of the labor-dominated People's Party. The new party swept county elections that November. Meanwhile, Cincinnati workers, angered by the unwillingness of local authorities to enforce eight-hour laws and by the mayor's decision to call in the state militia after a series of strikes and demonstrations in May 1886, organized their own ULP. The new party placed nine men on the city council the following spring, a promising showing. Together with George's performance in New York, such successes heightened the expectations of those aiming to establish a permanent labor party in the United States.[15]

Those hopes were dashed almost as quickly as they formed. Cincinnati's United Labor Party, wracked by tensions between Knights, Socialists, and George supporters, declined steadily from its peak in early 1887 and was no longer a factor in local politics two years later. Chicago's ULP proved unable to build on the momentum established in 1886. In municipal elections the following spring, it increased its share of the vote slightly, but candidates for mayor and other citywide offices lost by substantial margins, undone by internal divisions and sharp criticism from business and political leaders that scared off middle-class voters. In Detroit, Boston, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and most other large cities

workingmen's parties made little headway at all. They were unable to pry enough working-class voters away from the major parties or unwilling to set aside factional differences long enough to carry an election. Though local circumstances varied, labor insurgencies were in general defeated by a combination of factors: intramural bickering; the continuing doubts of some workers about the efficacy of independent politics; the ability of the mainstream parties to accommodate labor with offices, patronage, and helpful policies; and the fierce resistance of from conservative opponents. The attempt to create a national party with Henry George as its spokesman foundered as well, torn apart by differences of ideology and agenda. By the time George lost a bid to become New York's secretary of state in the fall of 1887, the movement for an independent labor party was all but spent as a political force.[16]

The rapid ascent and equally sudden descent of municipal labor parties during the 1880s seems little more than a hiccup amid the major party dominance of late nineteenth-century American politics. But a tally of election results does not reveal the full significance of labor's political insurgency during the Great Upheaval. Its challenge to the prevailing order and the response it precipitated decisively shaped how workers and their advocates approached city politics and defined their place within it. At the start they imagined themselves at the forefront of an attempt to purify the politics of the city and the nation. When that effort failed, a less ambitious self-understanding took hold, one in which they defined themselves as just one of many interests in a plural society.

Labor insurgents presented themselves chiefly in republican terms, as independent, selfless citizens seeking the restoration of a truly democratic republican political order.[17] Theirs was "not a fight for spoils but a struggle for liberty," Cincinnati laborite William Ogden explained. *John Swinton's Paper,* a labor weekly, heralded George's campaign as an effort "to restore the pristine principles of true democracy" and to "renew the original foundations of our republic." In Boston, Knights of Labor leader George McNeil proclaimed that "the success or failure of the republican experiment rests with us," a sentiment that most leaders and many of the followers of municipal labor campaigns shared.[18] The goal was not a return to an idyllic, preindustrial society and politics. Rather, labor leaders adopted a forward-looking perspective that sought to avoid the extremes of inequality that had characterized industrial development in both Europe and the United States.

Rescuing the republic required political reform, which local labor parties emphatically endorsed. The success of Chicago's United Labor Party, the city's *Knights of Labor* newspaper insisted, meant "the death knell of corruption," and any vote cast in its favor constituted a vote "in favor of good government and

reform." Robert Nelson, the Chicago ULP's candidate for mayor in 1887, promised "honest government" if elected. Henry George's backers pledged that their candidate would "sweep away corruption and reform the police," the latter point a reminder of the brutal anti-labor tactics used by law enforcement officials with close ties to the Tammany organization. The George campaign was fundamentally "an effort at municipal reform," proclaimed *The Reflector,* an illustrated labor paper that staunchly supported his campaign. Similar themes were sounded in most if not all of the cities where labor insurgencies developed during the mid-1880s. In places such as New York, Chicago, Cincinnati, and Milwaukee, where state power had been employed in repressive fashion against workers, the call for political reform was especially resonant and insurgent campaigns were most successful.[19]

Despite labeling themselves "United Labor" or "Workingmen," labor activists insisted that their movement represented the interests of the whole community rather than a specific segment of it. Robert Nelson proclaimed, "We have cut away from the old parties and have established a party which is not and never will be used in the interest of one class, but for the people."[20]

Arguing that in the 1887 municipal vote "independent action" was required to defeat "the extortion and peculation of a standing army of professional politicians," Cincinnati's ULP invited "all citizens who desire honest government to join us in an effort to secure it." In part such claims aimed to deflect charges that the labor activists were introducing class into politics and needlessly dividing the body politic. But repeated references to workers as "the people" and "citizens" also reflected the belief that workers, broadly defined, not only constituted the overwhelming majority of the community but possessed a civic virtue that capitalists and their political lackeys did not.[21]

Henry George insisted that his campaign be viewed in these terms. He described his nomination as the actions of "the great body of citizens" of New York. "We are American citizens desirous of purging our political system of its corruptions and of carrying into full effect the great principles of individual liberty proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence," he proclaimed in another instance. "We are upholders of social order, defenders of the true right of property, and advocates of that equal justice between man and man which is the essence of all true religion." The implicit contrast in such pronouncements, between sober, respectable, ethical citizen-workers on one side and immoral politicians and businessmen on the other, constituted labor's principal script during the insurgency of the 1880s.[22]

A few labor leaders rejected the working-class label altogether. "We are the middle class of society" declared A. J. Streator, chairman of the National United Labor Party, launched in early 1887. "[We are] not the extremely rich or extremely

poor. We stand on middle ground. We have come here to organize and save this government from the extremes of one and the robbery of the other." Another ULP leader concurred: "We are the middle classes. There are fast becoming two classes in this country—the extremely rich and extremely poor. We wish to prevent the encroachments of both."[23]

Such claims to middle-class status were more credible than they might now appear. As Robert Johnston and others have argued, the middle class was a more capacious category during this era than is usually assumed. It was possible not only for workers to define themselves as respectable members of the middle class but for there to exist a significant degree of interaction and overlap between manual workers and small proprietors. Mutual sympathy developed from these relationships, permitting a sense of comity and even common identity to develop between those who, from a Marxist perspective, belonged on either side of the class divide.[24]

Producerist logic helped make such claims credible. The Knights of Labor and other labor activists argued that all but a few callings might be fairly classified as members of the producing classes, including teachers, shop owners, and doctors. Only those who profited from the labors of others, such as bankers and speculators, were excluded. So broad an understanding of productive work allowed insurgents to draw the circle of worker-citizens widely. New York's United Labor Party made just such an attempt when it invited middle-class professionals and businessmen to a meeting in support of George's candidacy. There were many, the party platform argued, "whom the vulgar do not classify with working-men." These included "physicians, lawyers, teachers, and working employers." The ULP staged a meeting for this "middle-class audience" in early October and won its endorsement for George. The candidate cited this meeting as proof that he represented the entire community rather than just the labor movement.[25]

This loose sense of what constituted a worker also permitted labor parties to nominate candidates who were not manual workers. This strategy was useful as a means of appealing to a wider range of voters and signifying the insurgency's broad conception of its constituency. The choice of Henry George, hardly a laborer himself, was one such manifestation of this tactic. Fred Stauber, Chicago ULP nominee for city treasurer, was a hardware store owner. In introducing him, the *Knights of Labor* stressed his strong performance while serving on the city council as a key qualification. But it also emphasized his background as a printer and house painter before his entrance into the petite bourgeoisie. The Chicago ULP faced an even more awkward situation when it nominated a lawyer for a judicial office. Producerism's hostility to lawyers—members of the parasitic classes who profited from the labor of others—made such a selection problematic. To

help resolve it, his supporters offered a profile that paid little attention to his legal acumen, focusing instead on his background as a carpenter and sailor as well as the fact that he was a self-taught lawyer. "He is clearly a self-made man," they insisted, who "knows what hard manual labor means." While such artful representations suggest the difficulty labor parties faced in claiming they were more than a class movement, they also point out the great pains to which laborites went to broaden the meaning of "workers."[26]

Claiming membership in the middle class carried with it an image of respectability that was politically useful. The emphasis that the Knights of Labor leadership placed on the moral respectability of the producing classes was echoed in the political movements of 1886 and 1887. Just as Knights leaders insisted that "the true Knight [was] sober, respectable, conservative, modest, nonopportunistic, lawful, respectful, educated," so too did labor candidates claim that the men they spoke for were well-behaved and trustworthy citizens. Chicago's *Knights of Labor* proudly reported the commentary of an astonished politician who found that "those labor fellows were a surprise to everybody. They came to the polls in their Sunday clothes and in a clean collar and shirt.…They behaved like gentleman and did not touch any liquor." A sympathetic reporter for the *Cincinnati Enquirer* cited the "orderly, gentlemanly appearance of the sons of toil" during a labor march, noting as well the absence of "drunkenness" and "rowdyism" at a subsequent rally. This clean-cut image permitted laborites to distinguish themselves from disreputable politicians in much the same fashion that liberal reformers did. One can almost hear E. L. Godkin's voice in Henry George's attack on Hewitt's supporters: "notorious corruptionists, keepers of gambling houses, officials smirched with the mire of Tweed, contractors who have grown rich by fat jobs, leaders of the 'Dead Rabbits,' and even, in more than one case, men who have been tried for their lives upon the charge of murder." This image also constituted a response to the charges that the labor movement was a hotbed of ne'er-do-wells and wild-eyed radicals bent on undermining the peace, prosperity, and good order of American society.[27]

With its concern for respectability and reform, the labor insurgency had much in common with Mugwumpery. Both groups attacked machine politics as disreputable, claimed to speak for the public interest, sought to restructure city government to make it fairer and more efficient, and called for a politics rooted in principles rather than partisanship. After his defeat George argued that the most important reform in need of enactment was the Australian (or secret) ballot, a staple of the liberal agenda as well. Taken at his word, a Chicago labor candidate might easily have been mistaken for a Mugwump when he declared that his idea of distributing patronage was to assign positions "to those that are best qualified to fill the offices."[28]

But labor's differences with liberal reformers were more telling. One illustration of the divergent views of labor reformers and elite liberals arose when Chicago's Citizens Association approached the ULP about cooperative efforts in pursuit of municipal reform. The party's sarcastic reply laid bare the distinctive understandings of reform that separated the two groups. ULP leaders agreed to meet if the upper-crust leaders of the Citizens Association promised to pursue several reforms. Among them were "honest taxation on real and personal property" (a category that included stocks and bank deposits), the condemnation of tax evaders, the punishment of corporate bribe givers as well as bribe takers (with especially harsh penalties for the bribe givers, who so often escaped notice and continued to "pass" as respectable citizens), and rigid enforcement of prostitution laws. This last proposal was not just a dig at the "many influential citizens" who on this topic "could give valuable information and assistance if they so desire." It also undermined blue-blood claims to moral respectability and enhanced labor's superiority on that score. The mocking tone of the ULP's response, which promised to "cheerfully welcome your assistance" if the Citizens Association agreed to the policy positions laid before it, cast elite reformers as hypocrites. Elite municipal reformers, Chicago's labor activists implied, profited from the unjust political, social, and economic arrangements that currently existed even as they claimed to want civic improvement. The real reformers in Chicago were the labor insurgents, not the well-heeled men of the Citizens Association.[29]

The exchange between the ULP and the Citizens Association also highlighted the alternative definitions of "the people" and "the interests" that lay at the heart of labor's republican vision. From the insurgents' perspective, workers represented the true people while their opponents served the interests of a selfish, illegitimate faction. Labor partisans argued that capitalists used their economic power to corrupt party politics and government, generating laws that helped the rich and dishonest at the expense of workers, thus creating illegitimate class distinctions based on wealth. To the degree that American society was characterized by a class hierarchy, it was the by-product of illicit and corrupt political actions, not naturally or socially justifiable differences. Political reform, properly understood, would restore equality to American civic and social life, even in an urban-industrial context.[30]

Labor insurgents repeated this argument, particularly when charged with advancing the interest of one class. Party politicians, or "political charlatans" characterized by "sordid ambition, deceit, and selfishness," as the *Knights of Labor* charged, represented the selfish and illegitimate interest of the upper classes. They had turned government "into a machine for enslaving the masses," had granted "class privileges" to the wealthy, and had "legislated in the interest of crafty combinations now controlling not only the avenues of production and

distribution, but holding law completely within their grasp, and rapidly absorbing the toil of the industries whose labor alone controls the wealth." New York's *Volkszeitung* reminded its readers of the republican dimension of these claims when it decried the "united aristocrats who run what calls itself a democratic party" and the "blind, selfish resistance of a privileged class against the progress of a democratic principle." Angrily rejecting charges that his candidacy served the interest of one class, Henry George put it more directly. Paraphrasing British prime minister William Gladstone, he declared his campaign "a movement of the masses against robbery by the classes."[31]

The charge that politicians served the interests of the wealthy few was occasionally sustained with specifics. Most notable were arguments that local authorities had unjustly intervened against workers during the eight-hour demonstrations of May 1886 and during New York City boycotts. But there were other claims as well. One such example arose in Chicago, where the ULP's platform included a charge that the streets in poor parts of the city were in disrepair while city authorities made sure that those in richer sections were well maintained. This contention sparked a sharp debate in the local press. In the conservative *Chicago Tribune* former Democratic mayor Carter Harrison blamed local residents for street conditions, arguing that property owners in working-class neighborhoods had failed to pay the special assessments necessary to maintain their streets. The *Knights of Labor* shot back that most workers were renters whose landlords lived in tonier sections of town. It blamed "the rich" who were willing to "clean, pave, and beautify the streets upon which they themselves live, but refuse to improve properties they rent on outside streets." Arguments of this sort buttressed the working-class claim that the urban political system was rigged in favor of a small number of selfish, wealthy residents at the expense of the many.[32]

Labor's partisans offered more than a promise to destroy the existing political apparatus. The movement's organizers and many of its rank and file advocated a distinctive approach to the conduct of politics. Insisting that their movement was truly democratic, they drew sharp contrasts between the way they acted and the operations of party machines. They forged an alternative set of institutions and practices that underscored the more open and democratic character of their politics. These efforts gave depth and credibility to labor's claim that it offered real reform.

In designing their politics, labor insurgents drew on the workplace culture that had developed in the preceding decades. Frustrated by a loss of autonomy on the shop floor, some American workers had offered cooperative arrangements as an alternative to the customary capitalist forms of ownership and employment. These proposals placed ownership of factories directly in the hands of workers, who governed firms collectively. Such a system required democratic

arrangements that ensured an equitable distribution of power. Workers engaged in cooperative production displayed, in Steven Leikin's words, "a nearly obsessive concern with democratic process." Meetings of the Stoneham (Massachusetts) Cooperative Boot and Shoe Company, he found, were "painfully meticulous and democratic," with full votes held for each element or step in the decision-making process. Such procedures represented a clear contrast to the closed-door proceedings of the major political parties. While only a handful of American workers actually worked in collectively run businesses, the egalitarian and democratic ideals they evinced had a wider influence, shaping both the vision of the Knights of Labor and the political movements that arose during the 1880s.[33]

Municipal labor parties emphasized the similarly democratic character of their actions. Henry George's nomination was the most significant case in point. His shrewd insistence that he would not accept the nomination of the CLU unless it gathered at least 30,000 pledges of support from voters ensured a sharp distinction with the nominating processes of the major parties. "He was not nominated by half a dozen political bosses" who met in secret and issued orders to a docile convention, an election-day flyer declared. Instead, "he became a candidate at the written request of more than thirty thousand voters, was formally nominated by the accredited delegates of labor organizations embracing seventy thousand men, and has been endorsed by citizens in every walk of life." The flyer went on to pronounce that George's nomination was "more truly democratic than any that has been made for a generation," a phrase that the candidate himself and many of his supporters used repeatedly during the campaign.[34]

The grassroots conduct of labor campaigns also stressed democratic procedures. When Chicago's United Labor Party set up a plan for organizing ward and town clubs in the run-up to the 1887 municipal elections, it designed a process that was supposed to be more open and fair than those employed by party organizations. After excluding men who lacked "good character," whom it defined as the "keeper of disreputable resorts," saloon keepers, and gamblers, and insisting that all applicants break ties with the Republicans and Democrats, it established procedures akin to those of a fraternal group. Members in good standing nominated candidates for a club, and a vote ensued. More telling was the process for nominating candidates. The club selected up to three eligible candidates for each open office, both within the ward and for each citywide position. They forwarded these names, along with the number of votes each received in the club elections, to the central party organization. The expectation was that the party leaders would honor the wishes of local clubs in selecting party nominees, a process that contrasted with the nominating methods of the major parties, where decisions about candidates were reached privately by leaders and dictated to local organizations.[35]

The stress on the open character of the nominating process was likely to resonate at this particular moment. As Mary Ryan has argued, the urban political process had grown increasingly closed after the Civil War. Where once political and social differences were worked out openly in city streets, they were now increasingly settled in private. The resurgent labor movement of the 1880s challenged that modus operandi with its street demonstrations, mass meetings, parades, and independent labor press. As Leon Fink has noted, when workers turned to politics, they carried with them this alternative style of public action. Henry George's campaign is a case in point. Faced with hostility from most of the mainstream press, George's supporters communicated their message outside the usual printed channels, employing means developed by the labor movement such as pledge drives, neighborhood club meetings, and street-corner rallies. Newspaper reports hinted at the discussions taking place in factories, where workers debated the merits of labor candidates and partisan loyalties. George's "tailboard campaign" involved outdoor speeches on city streets and included various local speakers as well as the mayoral candidate. Although George made several major speeches indoors at traditional civic venues such as Chickering Hall, the heart of his campaign operated in city streets, as the impressive 30,000-strong parade of supporters who marched in the rain on the Saturday night before the election demonstrated. And when campaigning did occur indoors, it often took place in union halls and on shop floors rather than in the saloons and ward rooms where party politics customarily resided.[36]

Labor's alternative political culture stressed masculinity as well as class. While many Knights of Labor assemblies welcomed women and a number of labor groups expressed support for women's rights, manliness was a core element of labor's political rhetoric and imagery. Robert Nelson, mayoral nominee of Chicago's ULP, was "a man, every inch a man." Running against "two millionaires," Henry George had wealth "not in his pocket, but in his manhood," *Swinton's* argued. The gendered connotation of the term "workingmen," which some parties adopted as a name and which was employed almost universally to describe the movement's constituency, was not accidental either. Ordinary workers who remained loyal to the major parties were "willing to sacrifice their manhood, honor, and good sense," labor insurgents insisted, using a phrasing that knitted masculinity with republican virtues. Most labor campaign events and demonstrations were predominantly male—not surprising in an era when women could not vote in most elections. Chicago's ULP even went so far as to reject the bid made by women delegates to participate in the group's 1887 municipal convention.[37]

Such exclusionary attitudes were not simply the natural by-product of the gendered character of Gilded Age political culture. There were reasons to expect

women to participate more fully in labor's electoral insurgency. Contrary to received notions about separate spheres, working-class women had been a part of the industrial workforce from the earliest stages of industrialization in the United States, and their numbers increased in the years that followed the Civil War. During the 1880s, when boycotts became a key weapon in labor's arsenal, women's importance grew. Since boycotts centered on consumption, a realm associated with feminine responsibilities, women often occupied the front lines in such campaigns. And even if the prevailing partisan political culture stressed masculinity, the equal-rights tradition embedded in labor ideology readily lent itself to calls for woman suffrage, and some laborites were among the most prominent supporters of efforts to win full voting rights for both sexes.[38]

Labor insurgents shied away from a more radical approach to matters of gender for several reasons. In part, they were simply responding pragmatically to the existing political order. Since men voted while women did not, and since women's participation in electoral politics was controversial, labor activists wanted to avoid what would have been a divisive issue as they attempted to maintain political unity. Party politicians had by the 1880s perfected the art of dismissing their elite reform critics as effeminate, but it was also important to deflect such claims by maintaining and accentuating the masculine character of the movement. The version of republicanism that had framed labor activism for decades and animated the political insurgency of the 1880s had a masculine tilt as well. Its conception of workers as independent in both the political and economic sense rested partly on traditional assumptions about gender roles. The economic and civic autonomy that workingmen demanded was designed to sustain their role as both breadwinner for a wife and children and their household's representative in public affairs. The linkage between "manhood, honor, and good sense," or as the *Knights of Labor* put it in another instance, between manliness and respectability, underscored this connection. Labor's effort to restore a middle-class order, built in part on separate spheres ideology, precluded greater concerns for women's rights.[39]

It was not gender but class that proved the most troublesome category for labor activists. Even as leaders of the movement insisted that they spoke for the people and that their efforts were undertaken on behalf of the true middle class, sharper appeals to working-class interests cropped up. In part this was the product of ideological divisions with the insurgency, which made it difficult for labor parties to speak in a single voice. It was also the result of the limitations inherent in using republicanism as a framework for a movement resting at bottom on class grievances. For all the republican talk about the restoration of a harmonious, democratic civic life among productive citizens, and for all the efforts to define workers as virtuously devoted to the common good, the engine driving the

insurgency was a sense of dissatisfaction specific to wage workers. Not surprisingly, unvarnished expressions of worker grievances, and the sense of social differentiation that accompanied them, arose despite the best efforts of ULP leaders and others to depict the movement differently.

The alternative political culture generated by the labor insurgency fed this tension. In reordering political space and redesigning political practices, it encouraged a remaking of political identities. In attempting to remove politics from the saloons and ward halls and relocate it in labor assembly halls, on shop floors, and in city streets, and in borrowing the democratic practices of the Knights and unions, the labor insurgency also aimed to make class loyalties more salient than cultural affinities such as ethnicity and religion, which party politicians had exploited so successfully for decades. The new Henry George Clubs that sprouted up during the 1886 election season, as Martin Shefter has noted, "insulated their members from, and provided an alternative to, the force of hegemonic opinion." As labor mobilized in this fashion in cities across the country, it offered an alternative political experience that accentuated class differences.[40]

The class dimensions of labor's reform vision grow clearer when we consider how insurgents used the machine metaphor. Like elite liberal reformers, spokesmen for labor parties fervently decried the new phenomenon of "machine politics." Henry George had criticized "what we call machine politics" as early as 1882, and attacks on party machines abound in labor rhetoric throughout 1886 and 1887. George and other labor candidates routinely promised to "overthrow machine rule" and assured supporters that their electoral success would bring an end to that style of politics. Frank Stauber, ULP nominee for Chicago city treasurer, characteristically insisted that his party's ticket was the product of democratic decision making and had not been put up "by a machine." The attraction of the machine metaphor for laborites was much the same as it was for Mugwumps. Both found in the term a means of contrasting the mindless obedience of thoughtless party workers with the independent, intelligent, and democratic exercise of citizenship each of them valued.[41]

But discussions of machines among workers had an added dimension. Hostility to the mechanization of production as dehumanizing had long been a part of the arguments and ideology of both labor and middle-class reformers. When Samuel Gompers bemoaned the "tendency…which makes man, the worker, a part of the machine," he was echoing a long-standing critique of industrialization that still resonated powerfully with working-class audiences during the 1880s. On indicating publicly his interest in the Central Labor Union's nomination, Henry George evoked the same theme, decrying the economic injustice that "turns human beings into mere machines." Like the Mugwumps, labor candidates conveyed a specific set of meanings when they spoke of machine politics.

For workers, the phrase had a distinctive, class-inflected critique of the prevailing order embedded within it.[42]

The distinctive meaning attached to the machine metaphor becomes clearer when we consider labor's most common choice of verb to accompany it. *Swinton's* enthusiastically depicted Henry George as "engaged in smashing" a "machine," and George himself described his supporters as "working-men [attempting] to smash their machines." Images of workers wrecking machinery repeatedly arose during the labor campaigns of the mid-1880s, both in the language labor activists used and the images they created. Such language and imagery undoubtedly evoked in the minds of many the memory of Luddites, and of radical, violent opposition to industrialization generally. At the very least it represented not only a rejection of mainstream party politics but also a liberation from the oppressive working conditions and difficult social and political circumstances brought on by industrialization.[43]

A front-page cartoon in the *New York Journal* just after that city's 1886 municipal election exemplified the machine-smashing theme (Figure 10). Under a headline referencing Tweed—"What will they do about it?"—George is depicted sitting amid the wreckage of the two parties. Wearing workman's overalls and gloves, he holds a sledgehammer labeled "68,000 votes." On his right is the wreckage of the Democratic political machine, gears and housing torn asunder and the names Tammany and County Democracy written on them. On his left are the remains of the Republican political machine, with a tiny Theodore Roosevelt hanging onto it. The caption promises that next time the labor party will face "one big machine" instead of two, but that George will have a "bigger hammer."

The cartoon neatly captured the tensions evoked by the labor insurgency of the 1880s. The destruction of the "machines" underscores the prevailing view among labor insurgents that both the George campaign and the efforts of labor parties in other cities were fundamentally about reforming politics. Like Mugwumps, they saw the elimination of machine politics as the chief challenge of those seeking to reform urban public life. The depiction of George as a worker, despite the fact that he was long removed from his life as a printer and could hardly be imagined to be a manual laborer himself, cut two ways. Laborers may well have nodded their heads approvingly at the broad understanding of a workingman as anyone sympathetic to labor's cause. The destruction of machinery also must have resonated with workers who were resistant to the way mechanized production remade work. But middle-class viewers might easily have seen it differently. For members of a group who were striving mightily to distinguish themselves from laborers in dress and comportment, the image of George in overalls wielding a hammer to destroy something may have reminded them of the distinctively working-class character and corresponding agenda of this

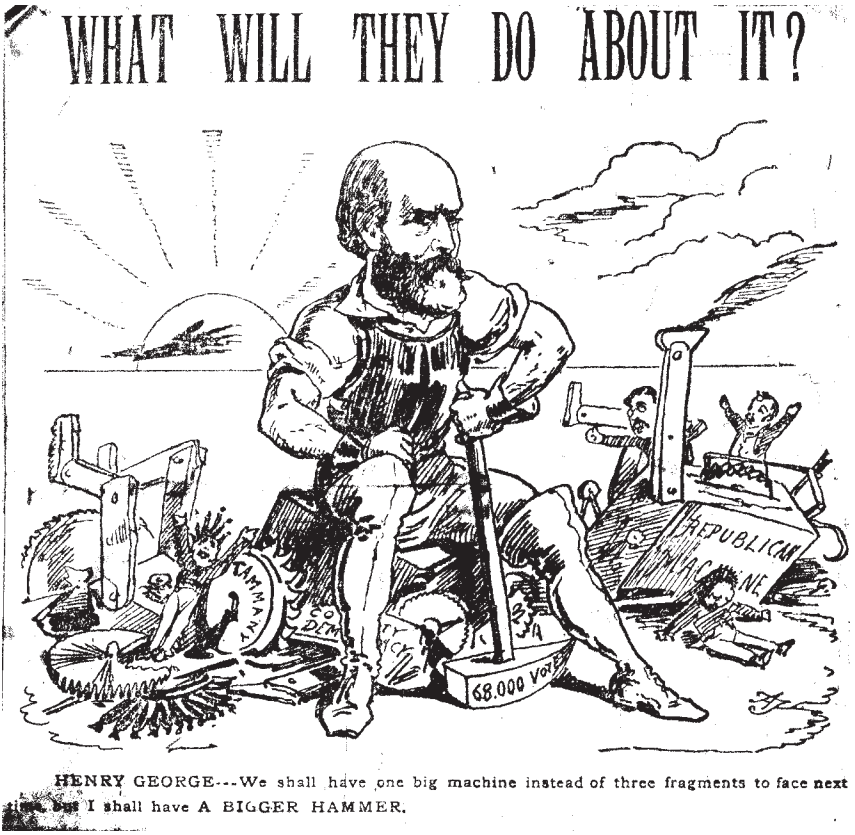


FIGURE 10. Henry George amid the wreckage of the two major party machines. *New York Journal,* November 7, 1886, p. 1, in Henry George Scrapbooks, vol. 20.

particular reform movement. It may also have triggered memories of the violent clashes at Haymarket Square or raised the prospect of attacks on private property. For the cartoon's bourgeois viewers, "smashing the machine" almost certainly carried unsettling connotations, particularly when workers were the source of the destruction.

Labor's critique of machine politics likely resonated with workers in another fashion as well. One of the challenges that the workingmen's insurgency of the 1880s faced was to wean laborers from their party loyalties. From labor's point of view, machine politics served the interest of the wealthy but maintained the loyalty of the lower classes through the distribution of patronage and favors. The ability of party politicians to provide necessary assistance to ordinary people coping with exigencies of everyday urban life, or at least their reputation for doing so, ensured popular support for institutions and leaders that worked

against labor's interests. When George and others referred to politics as a "trade" or a "business" or when parties were labeled machines, workers were reminded of the difficulties they faced in the sphere of work and were encouraged to abandon party loyalties and assert their class identities in politics.[44]

The class sentiments targeted by labor's use of the machine metaphor arose in other ways as well. The grievances that fueled political insurgency in cities were those of wage earners rather than independent proprietors, and it was difficult to avoid acknowledgment of that fact. Knights of Labor leaders and even labor party activists themselves tried to frame their campaigns as movements of the middle class or of the "working classes," with the plural usage implying that many occupational groups could be classified as productive labor. Class-specific language nevertheless crept into insurgent rhetoric. The origins of George's candidacy offer a case in point. When New York's CLU began hatching plans for the political movement that would nominate him for mayor, the idea was to draw together "the wage workers, of whatever calling." Ground rules for the group's initial meeting required that all delegates be "bona fide working-men," and its platform made it clear that the movement represented "the combined wage-working classes" that constituted "the great majority of the people." The reference to wage workers was significant. It separated employees from small proprietors and professionals, thus making clear from whom the movement emanated. Those who earned wages, not those who paid them or who worked for themselves, represented the core constituency of the campaign that was to follow.[45]

Nomination in such a fashion required that George acknowledge the class character of the movement he suddenly headed. Although he knew he could not rely solely on the votes of manual laborers and sought wider support, he had to recognize the working-class basis of his selection, particularly when speaking directly to workers. He told one union meeting, "I am your representative, put in the field by the accredited delegates of organized labor, and as their candidate I propose to run, and as their candidate I feel confident of election." At another campaign stop George avowed that while his "sympathies" went out "to all classes…especially do I represent now that greatest of all classes, the working class." Even when he reached out beyond the ranks of workers in pursuit of support, it was clear that middle-class backing was secondary. When George met with "businessmen" in Chickering Hall in early October 1886, he had to acknowledge that his "nomination" came from "organized labor" while he had received merely "the indorsement" of "the business and professional men of New York City."[46]

Commentary from other sources betrayed the sense of class conflict that underlay labor's political insurgency. *Swinton's* gleefully warned in late 1886 that "the 'rabble' are becoming possessed with novel ideas." The use of quotation

marks suggested an ironic use of the word "rabble," but it also signified a sense of pride that the lower orders of society were at the forefront of the political revolt brewing in American cities. Workingmen in Chicago switched to the ULP, the *Knights of Labor* explained, because they could not trust the established parties to protect "their rights and interests," a formulation that implied that workers had distinctive demands. The labor party, it noted, was created "to promote well defined ends."[47] At the meeting to launch Cincinnati's labor party, one resolution declared that "the oppressed labor class contains within itself persons capable and honest enough to represent and advance its interests," and an organizer explained to a reporter that the purpose of the new party was "to secure legislation favorable to the workingmen." Yet the party would go on to insist that it was a reform organization working for "all citizens." This inconsistency, which was evident in virtually every labor party of the 1880s, reflected the difficulty of mixing class grievances with republican devotion to the common good. It also hinted at the transition under way from older ideals of civic unity to forthright acknowledgment of political pluralism.[48]

Frank expressions of class interest also created an opening for labor's opponents. In every large city, business leaders and party politicians stressed that the various workingmen's parties represented a class rather than the people as a whole. Commenting on the United Labor Party, the *Chicago Tribune* declared that "for the first time in the history of Chicago, a complete municipal ticket has been nominated which represents one class alone." Former Chicago mayor Carter Harrison predicted the ULP would be "effervescent" (he presumably meant evanescent) because "in this country no party founded on class can become a dominant party." New York Democrats sounded the same theme, accusing Henry George of attempting "to array the citizens of this community into hostile classes divided by their occupations and avocations in life rather than by their political opinions." Democratic nominee Abram Hewitt declared George's campaign "an attempt…to organize one class of our citizens against all other classes."[49]

The problem, according to labor's critics, was the threat that class politics posed to American institutions and in particular to property rights. New York Democrats accused George of preaching the "gospel of anarchy," and Hewitt linked the doctrines of the labor party with "the horrors of the French Revolution and the Commune." A group of pro-Democratic businessmen declared that "by the candidacy of Henry George the business interests of the city are menaced; the security of property is threatened, and subversion of law and order is openly advocated under specious appeals to the passion and prejudice of class." The *Chicago Tribune* warned that his "gospel of blunder" would "abolish all private property in land" and would confiscate it "without the least idea of compensation." In Cincinnati, businessmen and party leaders declared that city's ULP the

tool of "foreigners without any understanding of our institutions," outsiders who were seeking to extort higher wages.[50]

Visual representations of Henry George regularly promoted this interpretation. Although a few sympathetic publications presented him positively, usually as a respectable, masculine workingman, much of the imagery generated by the mainstream press linked him and the movement he led to radicalism. *Puck, Judge, Leslie's,* and *Harper's* regularly depicted George as the tool of anarchists and an advocate of the confiscation of private property. A *Harper's* cartoon showed George pointing toward the word "theory" in the misty distance while strapped to the back of a woolly-haired workman who reached for a bomb bearing the label "practice." The workman's profile was noticeably simian, and his clothing was in tatters, markers of his racial character and his lower-class status. The strap binding them displayed the word "votes." A caption used George's own words against him, a common tactic, by quoting his warning that the French Revolution was "about to repeat itself." This stark linkage of George to anarchy and violence was but one of many images making a similar point. George may have been just a theorist, but the movement he headed was radical and violent.[51]

The workingmen's movement as a whole received similar treatment. The November 13, 1886, cover of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly Newspaper* showed Uncle Sam congratulating a neatly dressed, clearly masculine laborer on George's strong showing (Figure 11). But he also warned the worker, "For your own good and that of the country, get rid of that dangerous companion of yours as soon as possible." In the background was a darkened figure waving a flag containing the word "Anarchy" in one hand and a knife in the other. The figure was leaping in the air, shouting, and several bombs were in front of him. The racialized, darkened figure, evidently of foreign origin, offered a sharp contrast with the self-evidently respectable white worker. Representations of this sort not only played on racial, nativist, and class fears to discredit radicalism; they sought to inure workingmen from the appeal of radicalism by promising support and respect if they avoided political extremes.

Labor party leaders resisted these portrayals, but it was difficult to counter the impact of attacks by national illustrated magazines, local dailies, and the major parties. Henry George moved back and forth between counterarguments, sometimes offering language that seemed to confirm his opponents' attacks. At times he downplayed the significance of class, stressing the support he had from business and professional men. In other cases he accepted the class label but insisted on the breadth of the term. "'A class movement,' Mr. Hewitt calls it," George declared at a crowded mass meeting in the Eighteenth Assembly District, "aye, a class movement if he pleases, but a class whose labor supports all other classes." This more militant reply may have been the product of George's growing

FIGURE 11. Uncle Sam congratulates a labor party representative on a strong showing in 1886 but warns him to get rid of his "dangerous companion." *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper,* November 13, 1886.

frustration with the efforts of Hewitt and his allies to paint him as a radical. Noting a particularly harsh attack in the *New York Evening Post,* he wrote privately, "I not only never meant to encourage lawlessness or disorder but never did, by direction or indirection."[52]

Frustration was particularly evident in Chicago after the ULP's disappointing showing in April 1887's municipal elections. German and Bohemian socialists exerted a strong influence in the movement, pushing the party's platform and rhetoric leftward. When defeat came, many were quick to blame both the counter-insurgency of the city's business and party leaders and the radicals who appeared to overplay their hand. "A Friend to the Cause" wrote to the *Knights of Labor* just after the vote, insisting that "the party has been beaten at the election by the fear, ill-defined, but all pervading, that a vote for the United Labor candidates, humble men though they may be, would be construed as an indorsement of anarchy and anarchists." Others were less temperate: the editor of the *Knights of Labor* blamed the "red flagism" of the ULP, and a correspondent attacked radicals and "foreign elements" for dragging the movement away from "pure republicanism." Such complaints suggest that however much the labor insurgency aimed to portray itself as a movement on behalf of the common good, it ultimately came to be defined in public debate as a radical movement on behalf of a specific class led by outsiders.[53]

Labor's inability to set the terms of debate led to the decline of not only its political organizations but also the republican vision that animated them. By the end of the 1880s both the Knights of Labor and the various workingmen's parties it helped spawn were fading rapidly. In the place of the Knights the American Federation of Labor (AFL) became the preeminent labor organization. It offered a pragmatic brand of unionism on behalf of skilled workers who abandoned producerist and cooperative ideals, acquiesced to the industrial capitalist order, and sought only to cut the best deal for themselves within that context. The AFL rejected independent partisanship as a means of addressing the plight of workers, accepting instead the political status quo and seeking only to advance its interests within that system. Although local Central Labor Unions did not automatically adopt the same method, over time the influence of Samuel Gompers and the AFL prevailed in most cities. During the 1890s some radicals within the AFL pushed for socialism and direct political action, but they had been largely marginalized by the end of the decade and Gompers had emerged as the leading spokesman for organized labor. There were still pockets of activists who tried to revive an independent labor politics derived from republican principles in cities, the most notable of whom was Henry Demarest Lloyd, who made an unsuccessful attempt to form a branch of the People's Party in Chicago in 1894. But the majority of workers remained loyal to the mainstream parties, and labor increasingly acted as a pressure group rather than a third party.[54]

The precise reasons for the failure of labor's insurgency have been the subject of debate by several generations of scholars. Carter Harrison's view that class politics was inevitably evanescent in an American context has had its share of defenders. So too has the claim that republicanism, with its emphasis on moral

unity and civic virtue, did not fit well with the class grievances that fueled the formation of labor parties in so many cities. Ideological and factional divisions within the ranks of labor mattered as well, particularly when they led to inconsistent utterances that opponents could exploit to portray the various parties as class movements or anarchist organizations. A few scholars note as well the nationalization of the economy, which dispersed the manufacturing process and reduced solidarity by deepening the boundaries of skill and industry. But despite differing explanations, there is little doubt that the ultimate failure of independent politics during the Great Upheaval undercut faith in labor's republican vision of a harmonious civic life in an industrial society. From this point forward, working-class political action would typically follow a different script, one presuming that class differences were a permanent, significant, and acceptable element of public life.[55]

If labor's insurgency did not remake the republic, it did enhance the importance of workers as a key constituency in urban political life. "If we have gained nothing else in this election," Henry George declared on the heels of his defeat in New York City, "we have given the powers that be a very sincere respect for the working-man's vote." Ironically, labor's fiercest critics may have helped this process along. Their demonization of labor parties as radical fomenters of class antagonism made the threat of working-class activism seem substantial, even if divisions within the movement and workers' enduring party loyalties limited the long-term prospects of labor parties. Responding to both the real and imagined potential of working-class voters, reformers and politicians sought to incorporate workers into voting coalitions in the hope of diverting them from more radical politics. As Richard Oestreicher puts it, "working-class unrest in the 1880s created a working-class presence in the minds of all strata in American society, even when the reality of working-class consciousness was far more contradictory than many people realized."[56]

At least one segment of labor moved comfortably into the role of interest group. In New York "a voice from the Central Labor Union"—one wonders if it was Gompers—responded to George's strong showing in 1886 by arguing for an alliance with one of the major parties instead of an independent course. George's 68,000 votes, the voice insisted, "means something for the future.…It means a balance of power that can be held together because of our superior organization, and it means with good and shrewd political management, we can control legislation in our interest.…If we are but careful and shrewd in the future we can accomplish wonders in a political way." Here was the approach that the American Federation of Labor and its local offshoots would pursue in coming years. Rejecting independent labor politics, they used the prospect of a coherent labor voting bloc to win concessions from the major parties.[57]

Not all labor activists chose to keep electoral politics at arm's length. For those inclined to more explicit political action, and especially for those concerned with the plight of less-skilled workers, Socialism provided an alternative. Socialists had been active in the American labor movement since at least the 1870s, primarily in the form of the Socialist Labor Party. A new, more pragmatic and reformist Socialist Party of America arose in 1901 under the leadership of Eugene Debs. It served as a vehicle for candidates espousing the working-class cause at all levels of the polity, though it was primarily in cities that it gained some degree of political power. In 1912 Socialists held 1,200 public offices in 340 municipalities, and the party would achieve power in larger cities such as Milwaukee and Minneapolis during the Progressive Era. But even with such triumphs, Socialism was more a threat than a force in early twentieth-century urban politics. Its chief effect may have been to stoke popular fears of working-class revolution and make the AFL's less radical agenda more attractive.[58]

Responding to both the reality and the specter of labor's power, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century urban reformers began to take the working class more seriously. They became more responsive to working-class demands, reinforcing the conception of labor as a legitimate interest within city politics. Settlements such as Chicago's Hull House and Boston's Denison House, launched soon after the Great Upheaval, not only welcomed workers but formed alliances with local labor leaders and supported some union activity. In Chicago, reformers created the Civic Federation, an organization that approached public life as constituted by a range of interests and saw labor as one of the principal elements of that order. A new breed of reform-minded mayors, such as Hazen Pingree in Detroit and Samuel Jones in Toledo, adopted labor-friendly policies that earned them working-class votes. Such exchanges benefited both sides. Politicians captured offices while labor not only claimed material benefits but also achieved recognition as a coherent, important constituency.[59]

Mainstream party leaders were also quick to recognize the significance of labor's success during the Great Upheaval. Theodore Roosevelt presciently argued that the large vote for George did "not mean a new party, but, unfortunately, a new element to be bid for by the old parties." Tammany General Committee chairman Hugh Grant agreed and immediately opened the bidding war. Noting that "this George vote has come to stay," he promised workingmen that "more could be accomplished through the Democratic Party than by a separate organization." During the late 1880s and 1890s Gotham's party leaders renewed their efforts to appease manual workers, a pattern that unfolded in other large cities as well.[60]

The ability of city machines, at times with a boost from the AFL, to steer workers away from independent politics meant that class politics would be

conducted in a particular way in most northern cities during the Progressive Era. The political insurgency of the Great Upheaval ensured that workers—or at least a segment of them—would matter in urban public life, just not in the form of an independent party that presented them as the quintessential republican citizens. Abram Hewitt explained the machine philosophy clearly. "Between capital and labor there never is and never can be any antagonism," he declared. "But between capitalists, or those who control capital, and laborers, there may be conflict of interests, which like all other disputes, must be adjusted by mutual concessions, or by the operation of law."[61] This approach would increasingly define the place of the working class in America city politics.

The definition of the working class in these terms, as an interest group rather than the people, accelerated the acceptance of political pluralism. If workers could act legitimately as an interest group—and both reformers and politicians treated them as such—then others could too. The fact that labor defined itself in opposition to business reinforced the idea that politics was about managing the competition among clashing groups. If such a formulation made workers' parties unlikely, it at least made them an influential force within a pluralistic civic order.

4

THE FEMININE CHALLENGE

Clubwomen and Urban Politics

Among the more notable episodes in municipal politics during the 1890s was the clash between Chicago alderman Johnny Powers and famed Hull House settlement worker Jane Addams. Concerned about horrific sanitary conditions in her neighborhood and frustrated by ineffective waste disposal, Addams sought to assume official responsibility for trash collection. Her bid for the job failed, though she did win appointment as Ward 19's garbage inspector. Subsequent investigations revealed that Powers, the local democratic boss, had directed the district's contract for waste disposal to an unscrupulous crony. Frustrated by his intransigence on the matter, Addams and her Hull House compatriots embarked on a campaign to unseat him which stretched from 1895 to 1898. Though it too failed, the effort attracted widespread interest, not least because it raised disruptive questions about gender and politics.[1]

Just how unsettling Addams's public activity was became clear when she received an angry letter from an anonymous Ward 19 "voter." After extolling Powers's generosity and asserting that woman's true role was as companion to man, the writer attacked Addams for her political activity. Concluding that her "highest ambition" was "to be recognized as capable of doing a man's work," the letter's author provided some advice. On her next "tour of inspection, through alleyways and old barns and such places where low depraved men with criminal records may be found (such a place a virtuous woman should be afraid to go) you might for a small sum induce one of such men to sell you his pecker and balls." Doing so would allow Addams "to prove [her]self a man," which in turn would provide her "the privilege of casting a vote."[2]

FIGURE 12. The *New York World* highlighted the feminine character of the 1890s anti-Tammany campaign. The Women's Municipal League played a key role in that movement, part of a larger wave of activism by women's clubs and other female institutions that disrupted popular assumptions about the masculine nature of urban public life. *New York World,* January 31, 1893, in Richard Croker, *Political Cartoons . . . Gathered by Their Target* (New York: W. P. Mitchell, n.d. [1900s]), n.p.

Despite his vulgarity, Addams's correspondent had a point. He recognized just how much the burst of public action by women around the turn of the twentieth century upset the gendered boundaries that defined American politics. Masculinity had long been a defining characteristic of the nation's public life. The custom of the nineteenth-century United States dictated that politics was a combative undertaking suitable only for tough, practical men. Delicate, emotional women could not endure exposure to such an environment and were expected to remain in the protective embrace of the domestic realm. There they could preserve their own moral purity and impart it to their children. This separate-spheres ideology was prescriptive rather than descriptive—few men or women led lives that matched it—but it carried force. Male politicians were quick to use it to dismiss both women who ventured into public and male reformers who rejected the manly norms of competition, aggression, and pragmatism as the basis for politics. The noticeable jump in women's activism after 1890 made such

policing more difficult, though as Addams and many other activist women discovered, their increased activity did not stop the censure altogether.

It was no coincidence that the work that so disturbed the dyspeptic Ward 19 voter took place in the alleys of Chicago. The largest portion of women's activism in the era, and much of the battle over gender roles it provoked, unfolded in urban settings. Settlements—residences that permitted some female reformers to live and work alongside those they helped and to undertake political action on their behalf—were a big-city phenomenon. A far larger range of women, including many middle-class wives and mothers unable to join settlements, organized clubs devoted to solving the social problems endemic to urban-industrial life (or redirected existing groups to that purpose). They pushed for clean streets, pure milk, safe food, improved schooling, and better working conditions. Even when the intransigence of municipal officials forced these activist women to work with state governments, they sought reforms that primarily addressed problems associated with big-city life. The term "municipal housekeeping," a Progressive Era phrase used to describe this range of clubwomen's reform activism, underscored both the urban and the feminine character of these efforts.[3]

The scholars who have explored this activism have pointed to several defining characteristics. They argue that the women who engaged in this work placed greater emphasis on the well-being of families, proved more willing to challenge capitalism and property rights, and were more open to using state power to alleviate social problems than men. These scholars also note that women reformers were more likely than their businessmen husbands and brothers to actually encounter people of different social backgrounds in the course of their reform work. Upper- and middle-class women, who often had the necessary leisure time, could venture into poor neighborhoods and engage in hands-on work themselves instead of relying on experts or hired help, experiences that sharpened their sense of social differences. They may not have always embraced their working-class and ethnic counterparts as full partners in reform, but they built bridges to them that permitted a greater degree of cross-class cooperation and sympathy than was evident in the work of comparable male reformers.[4]

Most recently, historians of Progressive Era women's activism have taken note of its democratic dimensions. They cite not only the willingness of middle-class women to work alongside African American, immigrant, and working-class women in city neighborhoods, but also their attempts to forge spaces and institutions that made such interaction possible. There were limits to these efforts, in both their conception and their execution, but taken together they represented a challenge to the prevailing political order in the nation's industrial cities.[5]

What made women's public activism provocative was not simply the policies pursued or institutions built, but the way in which it reshuffled assumptions about gender that propped up political life. To varying degrees, clubwomen

conceived of public life as inclusive, cooperative, and rooted in a shared morality rather than as a form of competition analogous to war. Insofar as politics came to be understood in these feminine terms, as a means to relieve suffering and to cleanse the community (literally and figuratively), and as a realm characterized by collaboration and dialogue, its manly character diminished and its male practitioners were put on the defensive. In some instances activist women consciously promoted this reconception of politics, but even when they did not—or did so imperfectly—their presence alone redefined politics. It would be too much to suggest that urban politics was fully feminized. Proponents of a masculine political culture responded to this challenge with a forceful reassertion of traditional ideas about gender and politics. But it is essential to recognize the ways in which women's increased public presence subverted the idea that politics was a manly realm of competition.

This chapter considers clubwomen's reform work along three overlapping fronts. One was the effort to purify city politics. Some women joined forces with male reformers in their attempts to unseat machine politicians, whom they perceived as impediments to social reform. Acting in a fashion reminiscent of the way Whigs and Republicans (and to a lesser extent Democrats) had employed women as symbols of morality through much of the nineteenth century, they capitalized on gendered notions of womanly purity to undermine the legitimacy of party bosses. More common were attempts to "domesticate" politics. Clubwomen, settlement workers, and other middle-class women worked to expand the scope of public life to include ostensibly feminine concerns such as the reduction of poverty, the amelioration of social problems, and the purification of the physical and social environment. A few activist women also challenged the political status quo in a more subtle but far-reaching way. They proposed models for democratic citizenship and politics that emphasized cooperation and dialogue, qualities antithetical to the masculine traits of aggression and competition that party politicians had long celebrated.

Clubwomen's attempts to purify politics represented the most traditional way of asserting themselves publicly. A few groups of women pursued nonpartisan but nevertheless frankly electoral agendas aimed at purifying local politics. The best-known such undertaking was Hull House's clash with Johnny Powers, but citywide efforts by clubwomen in New York and Philadelphia were probably the most extensive. The Women's Municipal League of New York City organized in 1894 specifically to assist in ousting Tammany from power. A decade later, middle- and upper-class women in Philadelphia formed the Women's Committee of the newly created City Party with the goal of defeating the local machine. In many respects these efforts followed the script established by Whig women

during the 1840s, in which women's activities served to underscore the moral claims advanced by men and to challenge the legitimacy of the opposition.

Among the groups to pursue an explicitly electoral agenda, none drew more initial attention than New York City's Women's Municipal League. Its prominence stemmed not only from its location in the nation's largest city but also from its dedication to overthrowing the notorious Tammany, a national symbol of political corruption. The public version of the League's origins credits an 1893 "suggestion" from Reverend Charles Parkhurst that the "wives, mothers, sisters, [and] daughters" of the city's respectable men organize themselves in support of his campaign against Tammany and its ties to the local vice industry. The League, working alongside several Republican women's organizations, played an active role in reform candidate William Strong's 1894 mayoral election. After that vote the League essentially ceased activity, but it returned in reconstituted form in 1897 to support the unsuccessful attempt of the newly created Citizens' Union to elect reformer Seth Low as mayor. It remained active in electoral politics through the 1903 election, at which point it shifted emphasis from electoral campaigning to nonpartisan lobbying for social reforms.[6]

In Philadelphia activist women undertook similar work for similar reasons. Upset by the gluttonous life of 1894 Republican mayoral prospect Boies Penrose, the city's clubwomen circulated a petition demanding a candidate "whose private life shows a high moral standard and whose mature character and experience in business affairs will ensure a good administration." Local municipal reformer Rudolph Blankenburg, whose wife, Lucretia, helped gather signatures, used the petition as a tool in the battle against Penrose that helped steer the nomination to a more respectable Republican. By the start of the twentieth century local women's organizations formed a significant portion of the organizational infrastructure for the city's municipal reform campaigns. In 1905 women reformers and activists helped organize the Women's Committee of the newly created City Party and played an active role in that fall's campaign. When Blankenburg ran for mayor in 1911, his wife's network of clubwomen formed the Women's Permanent Committee for Good Government. Two years later that organization became the Women's League for Good Government (WLGG), which remained active into the 1920s and spearheaded efforts to rewrite the city charter.[7]

The assumption that women were inherently more virtuous than men drove this activism. In both cities sensational revelations and the moral outrage they sparked provided a rationale for women's entrance into the political arena. In New York, Reverend Charles Parkhurst undertook a well-chronicled investigation of the links between Tammany and the vice industry, complete with an incognito tour of Gotham's sex-soaked underworld. In Philadelphia the dissatisfaction with Penrose's behavior spurred the initial wave of women's electoral activism. In

such a context, women could attack the party in power on a moral basis rather than as a matter of political preference. Josephine Shaw Lowell, a founder of New York's Women's Municipal League, made just such a point when she argued that Tammany was so obviously odious that opposition to it amounted to a matter of morality rather than politics.[8]

The equation of femininity with moral virtue sustained these organizations. A 1903 speech by Women's Municipal League member Maud Nathan demonstrated how such a framework operated. Presented in support of the reelection bid of New York reform mayor Seth Low, it framed the upcoming election as a contest between "the Lady"—a reference to a Statue of Liberty–style feminine (and republican) symbol the Citizens' Union used to represent the city—and "the Tiger," an obvious allusion to Tammany. The comparison drew on Frank Stockton's famous short story about making a difficult choice, but for Nathan the decision was obvious: the Lady represented "honor, virtue and peace" while the Tiger promised to "sink its fangs into the people." Casting the election in these gendered terms worked on several levels. Male voters were addressed as "gladiators," meshing with traditional assumptions about party politics as a masculine realm of conflict. Even more significantly, depicting the Citizens' Union as a feminized vessel of civic virtue allowed women reformers to portray themselves as above politics.[9]

Such assertions of femininity carried with them an implication of women's unity. From the start the WML claimed to speak for women of all social backgrounds. Though the women invited to launch the organization during the 1894 campaign included the wives of such prominent reformers as E. L. Godkin, Richard Watson Gilder, and Charles Parkhurst, as well as members of leading families such as Josephine Shaw Lowell, organizers stressed the new group's diversity. The League, Ellen Parkhurst declared, "will be broad enough to admit every one. There will be no doctrinal, political, race, or class prejudices. Roman Catholics will be welcome and Hebrews. It will be an organization of workingwomen as well as women of leisure." Rhetoric aside, it was not clear how sincere this commitment to diversity was. In the same statement Parkhurst noted that her point about the organization's social breadth was not discussed at the initial meeting but it was nevertheless an essential part of the plan for the organization. With unintended irony, the *New York Times* pronounced the list of women invited to the group's first meeting "wonderfully comprehensive" because it included "women interested in philanthropy and reform" as well as "society women of different religious sects and various political opinions."[10]

The League made an effort to mobilize working-class and immigrant women in support of its cause. During the 1894 campaign its members visited the tenement districts of the Lower East Side, urging German and Russian women to

lobby their husbands. Stumping for Seth Low in 1901, Maud Nathan targeted lower-class Jewish women, giving street-corner speeches on the Lower East Side that a fellow activist translated into Yiddish. "Facts for Fathers and Mothers," a League pamphlet produced for the campaign, blamed Tammany for protecting a thriving vice trade that exploited large numbers of immigrant and working-class women, particularly in the city's Jewish quarter. To arouse popular resentment among Jews, the pamphlet reported in detail on the links between Lower East Side Tammany leaders and local brothels. An astounding 900,000 copies were printed—more than one per voter—and distributed by mail to every registered voter in Manhattan and the Bronx. An additional 100,000 copies were included in a German-language newspaper, all testimony to the efforts of League activists to mobilize working-class and immigrant voters on an issue deemed moral rather than political. In 1903 the League went further than ever in its grassroots activism, creating a thirty-one-member committee devoted to organizing voters in each Assembly District in the city. It also went to great lengths to procure speakers in every language necessary to communicate to voters in polyglot New York and staffed its campaign office with multilingual workers.[11]

The elite women who led reform efforts in Philadelphia employed similar methods. The Women's Committee of the City Party (the Women's City Party) worked aggressively to establish a presence in every part of the city. Its plan called for an organization in every ward, and it managed to set up operations in most of them during the 1905 campaign. Members ventured into blue-collar districts to hold "parlour meetings," to work through churches and Bible classes, and to link up with such groups as the Jewish Council of Women and the Afro-American Committee of Women. The Women's Committee held out particular hopes of making inroads among black voters and those residing in the city's "foreign quarters." It distributed circulars in Yiddish, German, and English; it lobbied Italian women; and it even met with Roman Catholic archbishop Patrick Ryan to arrange for literature to be distributed to Catholic women. The Women's Committee also organized 134 ward meetings during the 1905 campaign.[12]

Activist women engaged in more grassroots outreach during the only other triumph for Philadelphia's Progressive Era municipal reformers. Exploiting a split in Republican leadership, they elected Rudolph Blankenburg mayor in 1911. During that campaign and in the municipal election that followed two years later, it fell largely to women to mobilize workers and immigrants. In part this tactic resulted from the failure of the male-run municipal reform movement to maintain a grassroots organization of its own. But it also reflected the prevailing assumption that women of all classes and ethnicities shared a connection that cut across these boundaries, and that by persuading wives and mothers one could bring along husbands and sons. Blankenburg's wife, Lucretia, was among

the leading clubwomen of the city, and she played a major role in mobilizing female organizations on his behalf. In 1911 the Women's Permanent Committee for Good Government and members of clubs organized a house-to-house canvass for the mayor and worked to turn out the vote for him on election day. During the 1913 city campaign what had become the Women's League for Good Government set up ward organizations, though it managed to create such groups in only 17 of 44 districts. It dispatched speakers to working-class districts and printed the Fusion Party platform in Hebrew, Italian, French, German, and Hungarian "for distribution among foreigners."[13]

Despite their attempts to reach out across class and ethnic boundaries, women reformers in New York and Philadelphia could hardly be described as democratic. The Women's Municipal League remained a miniscule group through 1901, when it expanded from 30 to 250 members. Even the larger figure hardly constituted an expansive presence in a city the size of New York. Outreach among Philadelphia reformers was inconsistent. While the Women's City Party established a presence in a few lower-class neighborhoods, its successor group, the Women's League for Good Government, did not. Though ostensibly dedicated to developing a branch in every ward, it managed to do so in fewer than half of them, and for the most part the branches emerged only in the more prosperous districts.[14]

The larger problem with these efforts was that activist women in New York and Philadelphia approached the working class and immigrants as targets, people to be educated and beneficiaries of League support. They were not peers whose ideas and agendas were worthy of serious consideration in setting a course for reform. The idea, as one observer noted, was to "come to the rescue of their less fortunate sisters in the slums and crowded tenements of the great city." It was not to approach them as equals. Josephine Shaw Lowell explained Women's Municipal League work as "an appeal to the voters to register and to vote for the sake of these helpless people who live so near to us, but whose lives are so cruelly different from ours." Even the carefully crafted speeches and printed appeals distributed by the League to immigrants saw them as consumers of information rather than potential partners in a cross-class or cross-ethnic collaboration. Acutely conscious of social differences, these politically active women were nevertheless unable to imagine their lower-class counterparts on an equal footing.[15]

Such limitations were very much in evidence when Lucretia Blankenburg herself ventured into working-class Philadelphia on the eve of the 1913 local elections. "We went down to the ghetto section," she reported in an account of her talk in a "congested section of Southeast Philadelphia" which was laced with condescension. "It was pathetic to see the eagerness with which the wives and mothers listened to us. We compared the city to a house and told them how the

contractors had been keeping the house." Blankenburg concluded that they "understood us"—evidently she had doubts that they would—and that they would get their husbands to vote for the Fusion ticket. To some extent, her concerns over the capacity of her audience to comprehend her talk reflected language barriers. But it is difficult to miss in Blankenburg's phrasing the sense of these women as childlike and alien. At no point in her account does she betray any reciprocal interest in the distinctive concerns of the women in her audience. Such were the limits of educational politics.[16]

There were other substantial impediments to building a cross-class, cross-ethnic coalition. In New York the Women's Municipal League was closely tied to the Republicans (despite its avowals of nonpartisanship), and it coordinated its efforts with the party's women's organizations. The League used Lincoln Hall, a Republican building, as its headquarters during the 1894 campaign. Its origins as part of the moralistic crusade spearheaded by Reverend Parkhurst also limited it, since the minister's sensationalistic complaints and anti-Tammany diatribes alienated as many as they galvanized. The cultural patterns that defined late nineteenth-century politics proved an obstacle as well. Notably absent from League efforts were Irish-Catholic women, who generally displayed little interest in the its partisan reform agenda. The League's single-minded focus on elections—and its quiescence between them—during its first decade of existence prevented it from establishing a sustained connection between its elite members and those it sought to mobilize.[17]

Another significant obstacle to mobilizing women was the conception of women and their roles which governed these endeavors. By presenting themselves as moral rather than political forces, each of these groups denied the possibility that there were other points of view. When Lowell insisted that "in reform movements, as in other undertakings, the great service which women can render is the maintenance of uncompromising ideals," she expressed an approach that fit poorly with the give-and-take that characterized politics in a cosmopolitan city. Compromise implied that there was some legitimacy to the opposing position and some obligation to understand all sides of an issue. The ideals of Victorian womanhood that animated Lowell, Blankenburg, and their organizations encouraged sympathy and succor for the poor but also made it difficult for them to imagine women from other classes and ethnic groups as moral equals with ideas, claims, and arguments worthy of consideration.[18]

In spite of these limitations, clubwomen's electoral insurgencies played an important role in expanding women's public roles. Journalist and reformer Oswald Garrison Villard took note of this impact in a 1902 address to the National Suffrage Convention. The speech reviewed the work of women in New York City's 1901 municipal campaign and cited in particular "some extremely interesting

changes in the attitudes of the New York public toward women in politics." A quarter century earlier, he noted, the sight of women speaking publicly, holding meetings, handing out pamphlets, raising money, and opening a political headquarters "would have aroused a story of indignation and scorn and would have evoked endless announcements that the fatal hour, so often prophesied, which is to mark the unsexing of or the masculinization of women, was at hand." During the 1890s, women's municipal reform work still seemed "freakish." But Villard, an active journalist in the city, detected no such qualms during the 1901 campaign. "Public sentiment," it seemed, had evolved. It was now "a matter of course" that women would engage in political activity. Although there is reason to suspect that Villard exaggerated—the speech was after all an endorsement of woman suffrage to an enthusiastic audience—it is likely he was not imagining things entirely.[19]

Though provocative, the participation of clubwomen in electoral politics was less significant than their work as social reformers. It was in battles for sanitation, education, factory safety, an end to prostitution, and a range of other measures rather than in campaigns for office that women's clubs most often made their mark. These endeavors were strictly nonpartisan and undertaken purely on behalf of the common good. Such an approach rendered them "invisible" in a political sense, as Glenda Gilmore has put it, able to act publicly without seeming to engage in the partisan agitation still considered inappropriate to women. Even in cities such as New York and Philadelphia, where women's groups assumed substantial roles in election campaigns, the bulk of female civic work took the form of groups pursuing social and moral reforms deemed to be within the purview of women's responsibilities.[20]

This approach to politics had developed along many fronts and over considerable time. During the first half of the nineteenth century, middle-class women devised a voluntarist style of political action that cited their domestic responsibilities and moral virtue as the basis for campaigns on behalf of abolition and temperance. Working through the United States Sanitary Commission, a female-run, Civil War–era federal agency established to aid the North's military effort, women gained experience managing a public enterprise. They put that experience to good use in the ensuing decades, working through local clubs and national networks such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union to shape public policy. Denied the vote and largely limited to issues considered within the female realm, they grew adept at using pressure-group tactics in support of social and moral reform.[21]

Women employed these political skills to reshape American governance and "domesticate" politics. By the end of the nineteenth century, activism among clubwomen had quickened considerably. During the Progressive Era they were

instrumental in the enactment of anti-sweatshop legislation, the creation of juvenile courts, the enforcement of more robust tenement regulations, the introduction of broad sanitary reforms, the passage of anti-pollution measures, the establishment of parks and playgrounds, and the implementation of consumer protections designed to ensure safe food, milk, and markets. These efforts were central to the development of the American welfare state. Originating in local agitation, they produced what Robyn Muncy has labeled a "female dominion for reform," which encompassed a federal Children's Bureau and a national network of women's clubs capable of shaping national social policy.[22]

Female activism of this sort was especially robust in Chicago. Hull House and other settlements, the Chicago Women's Club, and the Women's City Club engaged in a broad range of reform work during the years from Reconstruction to the Great Depression. The middle-class women who ran them did not hesitate to demand state action to address social problems, and they often collaborated with women from different class, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. The result of their activity was a considerable body of reform achievements that broadened the scope and power of municipal and state government.[23]

The most sustained and substantial organization of women in that city was the Chicago Women's Club (CWC). Formed in 1876, the CWC differed from the handful of other women's groups active in the city at the time in its determination to "take up the live issues of this world we live in," as Club founder Caroline Brown put it. While other female organizations served social or literary purposes, the CWC proposed to engage in civic work. As Maureen Flanagan has noted, the experiences of women in the aftermath of the 1871 Chicago Fire, where they had played a central role in relief efforts, provided a template that likely shaped the CWC's agenda. Its first four committees—Home, Education, Philanthropy, and Reform—reflected its intention to do something more than gather to sip tea and listen to lectures on art.[24]

The CWC expanded both its membership and agenda over the final decades of the nineteenth century. Women joined at a steady clip, and the group's members increased from 64 in 1880 to more than 600 in 1893 and 1,000 by 1900.[25] When most women's groups still shied away from lobbying, the CWC publicly pursued a wide range of reform causes. As early as 1888 the organization took the provocative step of circulating petitions and holding public meetings to demand that women be named to municipal offices. During the 1890s the club pressured local and state government on many social reform fronts, including tenement reform and the regulation of sweatshops. After the turn of the century it took the lead in campaigns for the minimum wage, investigations of industrial conditions in the city, and housing reform. In most instances these efforts produced legislation or increased government activism.[26]

The Women's City Club (WCC), Chicago's second major women's civic group, followed the CWC's lead. Organized in 1910, it aimed "to bring together women interested in promoting the welfare of the city" and "to coordinate and render more effective the scattered social and civic activities in which they are engaged." By 1914 it included seventeen civic committees devoted to social reforms concerning the maintenance of parks, sanitation, housing, child welfare, and the condition of food and markets. Two years later the group had twenty-five such subcommittees. These efforts yielded considerable fruit, helping to convince city and state authorities to take on a host of new regulatory and social service responsibilities. The WCC was at the forefront of campaigns for housing reform, improved garbage collection, better fire protection, cleaner air, and greater public access to Lake Michigan, to name but a few Club initiatives. A comparison with the agenda of the WCC's male analogue, the City Club, reveals considerably more interest in social reforms that directly affected the lives of ordinary Chicagoans among the women and greater emphasis on fiscal matters and urban infrastructure among the men.[27]

Boston's Women's Municipal League (WML) pursued similar goals. Established in 1908, the WML filled the vacuum created when the Boston Equal Suffrage Association for Good Government gave up social reform agitation to concentrate on voting rights. Its "sole object," a founder declared, was "to survey the city in all its activities and focus them all into one great cooperating, co-ordinated whole." Committees on education, social welfare, streets and alleys, and public improvement and sanitation (this last with nine subcommittees dealing with issues ranging from infant social service to the elimination of rats and flies) set to work in 1909. By 1910 the League's lobbying efforts were in full swing, as members testified in favor of a bill prohibiting waste disposal in public streets, demanded the regular sweeping of Dartmouth Street Bridge, pushed for an annual vacation for all city workers, advocated the incineration of garbage along the lines followed in European cities, and cooperated with North End settlement workers in a campaign for cleaner streets. The League hired an inspector to investigate conditions at the city's markets in 1909 and created a traveling exhibit demonstrating the need to keep them clean. In 1914 it conducted a much publicized market survey that assessed sanitation at markets throughout the city.[28]

On these and other fronts the League achieved remarkable success. The bill barring waste disposal in streets passed, as did numerous other measures promoted wholly or partly by the WML. In the process, the powers and responsibilities of local government grew. Responding partly to League pressure, the state empowered the city to arrest litterers, clean private ways, limit occupancy of cellars and basements, and fine violators of Board of Health regulations (many of which were first proposed by the WML). Mayor John Fitzgerald also gave the

League credit for the city's renewed street-cleaning efforts. The WML's Open-Air School, launched in 1910, became a permanent city program in 1914. The School Board took over the League-run evening school in 1911 and assumed control of a citywide placement bureau first established by the WML in 1916. City officials also relied on the files of the League's market inspector and its housing department to fulfill its widening responsibilities, so much so that in 1915 the League reported that it had become a virtual arm of the city's Board of Health.[29]

As in Chicago, the women's reform agenda in Boston differed sharply from that offered by its most obvious male counterpart, the Good Government Association (GGA). Unlike the GGA, the WML made a sustained attempt to forge a grassroots organization. The men of the GGA contemplated a neighborhood-by-neighborhood structure but quickly abandoned it for a more centralized model of political action controlled by just a few business leaders. They also ignored virtually all the social reform efforts under way in Progressive Era Boston, choosing instead to concentrate solely on questions of honesty and efficiency in government. When an economic downturn created hardship for many Bostonians, for instance, the WML responded by creating a committee on unemployment and pushing for relief, but the GGA ignored the issue. And while the WML campaigned for cleaner streets, the GGA sought ways of cleaning streets more cheaply, a telling difference.[30]

Activism of this sort was not limited to Chicago and Boston, nor were clubs its only vehicle. Nearly every northern city had one or more such groups, all pursuing similar agendas. The General Federation of Women's Clubs, a national network of these organizations, also emerged as a powerful force for reform during the Progressive Era, spearheading campaigns for child labor legislation and other social reforms. Settlement houses also advocated these reforms, and there was considerable overlap and coordination between their efforts and those of urban women's clubs. Nearly every city government in the North, many states, and increasingly the federal government began to take greater responsibility for the welfare of ordinary citizens, especially women and children. To a large degree, this sea change in American thinking about government and politics originated with the grassroots campaigns of activist women in industrial cities.

The significance of this domestication of politics carried beyond its impact on governance. The assumption by the state of responsibilities once deemed purely feminine helped weaken the notion that only men could lead or that manly traits such as aggression or competitiveness were essential to the exercise of public authority. But the constant, visible civic work of female activists may have mattered more. If women serving on public boards, inspecting factories, streets, and markets, or offering expert testimony at legislative hearings were not quite ordinary occurrences, they were no longer novelties. Acceptance of such activity, however

grudging, inevitably undercut the idea that politics was a wholly masculine enterprise. It also contradicted the image of women as overly emotional, irrational beings incapable of engaging in credible public work.

Perhaps the best indication that women were taken seriously as civic actors came from party politicians themselves. While it was always possible to find snickering dismissals of manly women, it became increasingly common for urban bosses to work with activist women in pursuit of social reforms. By the 1910s, machine politicians such as Tim Sullivan, Martin Lomasney, James Michael Curley, and John Fitzgerald had joined forces with women's groups to develop government social programs at the municipal and state levels. Indeed, much of the urban liberalism associated with Progressive Era machine politics arose in response to pressure from women's groups and labor. The most famous instance of such collaboration involved Al Smith and Robert Wagner of Tammany Hall, who worked with Frances Perkins and other women reformers as well as labor leaders to pass factory safety legislation in the wake of the infamous Triangle Factory fire. Some urban party bosses even came around to supporting suffrage, a calculation that reflects the extent to which women had been accepted as political actors.[31]

Activist women challenged the prevailing political order in another, more direct way. Embedded in the assertion of a feminine version of politics were the lineaments of a more deliberative democracy. In claiming that women's clubs represented all women, the leaders of these organizations obligated themselves to engage with women of other classes, races, and ethnicities. Though hardly perfect on this score, many women's clubs became increasingly serious in their efforts to meet this standard, certainly more so than their male counterparts. Many of them sought to engage with working-class, immigrant, and African American women. A few recognized that something more than inclusion was necessary. They worked to create spaces and opportunities for civic deliberation so that citizens possessing different perspectives and values could exchange views and come to some understanding about public matters. There were conceptual flaws and practical limits to these efforts. Creating opportunities for discussion did not by itself ensure that the ideas those conversations generated would help shape public policy. And even with the most inclusive of intentions, clubwomen were not always able to overcome long-standing barriers between social classes, races, and ethnic groups.

Yet even when they remained socially exclusive, clubwomen and their work as lobbyists and advocates for public causes changed the social dynamic of urban public life. Women were not bound by the masculine code of aggression and conflict that governed men's political comportment. They could speak

sympathetically of workers, immigrants, African Americans, and the poor. They could also approach public questions as matters for discussion instead of contestation. Men could (and some did) operate this way in public as well. But doing so violated norms of manly behavior that left them vulnerable to delegitimizing charges of effeminacy. The compassion and cooperativeness that activist women brought to public life often came intertwined with condescension, but even then it represented a step toward common ground.

Few if any Progressive Era reform groups did more to cooperate across class and ethnic lines than the Chicago Women's Club. Its agenda reflected a concern for the plight of working-class women in particular and workers generally. Though animated by the idea that all women shared a common set of experiences and concerns, it signaled its awareness of social differences as well. By the end of the nineteenth century the CWC was actively building coalitions with ethnic, religious, and neighborhood groups such as the Union of Bohemian Women and the Ida B. Wells Club. It was also allying itself with working-class groups, most notably through coordination with the Illinois Women's Alliance (IWA) on a number of fronts. The IWA was an umbrella group launched by trade unionists to pursue social reforms. Its approach was predicated on the idea that government had a responsibility to provide for the general welfare. Though its membership was mostly middle class, the IWA's founders included several prominent socialists, and its agenda featured demands for stricter factory regulations, tenement reform, and the enactment of a new, more stringent compulsory education law. The CWC worked with it to enforce existing school attendance laws and to investigate the treatment of women in city courts.[32]

As these cooperative endeavors suggest, the CWC envisioned itself as an organization working on behalf of all women. CWC founder Caroline Brown recalled of the Club's early days that "before outside work could be successfully undertaken, there was necessary a welding together of the diverse elements of the Club—the growth of a broad tolerance for the widest difference of opinion." That pluralistic mindset revealed itself not only through collaboration with women's groups representing various ethnicities, races, and classes, but in the CWC's decision to pass a resolution in 1895 insisting that no applicant could be excluded from membership on the basis of race or color. Soon thereafter the club amended its membership policies to note that the organization was open to women regardless of race, color, religion, or political affiliation. When a CWC representative later claimed to speak for "this great heterogeneous Chicago family"—a phrase that neatly captured the dual sense of unity and difference that animated the group—its policies lent her statement a degree of credibility.[33]

The Women's City Club of Chicago also approached the city as a diverse community rather than a singular entity. Organized in 1910 as a group designed to

unite the wide range of women's groups active in the city, it explicitly aimed to speak for all Chicago women. The goal was "to bring together women interested in promoting the welfare of the city" and "to coordinate and render more effective the scattered social and civic activities in which they are engaged." Such a definition acknowledged the diversity of women's groups already at work in the city even as it took for granted that women of different backgrounds shared a common interest in "ennobling…that larger home of all—the city." The group assumed that a common ground rooted in domestic experiences existed among women, even in a heterogeneous urban context.[34]

The WCC had a larger and broader membership than the CWC and put more effort into mobilizing at the grass roots. Its modest dues—just two dollars per year as late as 1915—made it possible at least in theory for lower-class women to join. The club's ranks swelled quickly after its founding, moving above 1,200 members within a year and reaching almost 3,000 by 1915. It also set up ward branches in 31 of the city's 35 wards by 1911, an achievement that reflected its commitment to representing all parts of the city. WCC organizers placed much emphasis on the role of these local bodies from the outset, and they remained a key facet of the Club's character through the first decade of its existence. Branches served to pressure city authorities about neighborhood concerns such as paving and sanitation and to promote civic life locally through lectures and patriotic activities.[35]

Boston's Women's Municipal League built a similarly decentralized structure. At its founding it promised a concerted effort to "induce women servants, poor wives and mothers of the tenement house districts, and women who work in stores, shops, and factories to become members." One way it did so was to organize at the ward level. The League's Sanitation Committee, its largest and most important unit, was split up into neighborhood subcommittees. Although it was difficult to find women to join in working-class districts, the League did at least seek to empower these communities.[36]

The emphasis on neighborhood organizations by women's clubs in Chicago and Boston reflected an inclusive impulse. The Chicago Women's Club launched a campaign to promote the use of schools during the evening for civic and educational activities involving local residents. It opened its first such "neighborhood center" in 1906, in the "back of the yards" section, the poor, immigrant-filled district in which Upton Sinclair set his famous muckraking novel *The Jungle*. In Boston the WML pushed for the use of schools as evening centers where the neighborhood could gather for both recreational and civic purposes. The first such arrangement developed in polyglot East Boston, spearhead by settlement worker and WML leader Mary Parker Follett. The idea behind these arrangements, as one CWC report explained, was to give "the people of the neighborhood" a voice

by providing them an opportunity to meet with city officials to discuss "methods of improving existing conditions."[37]

There was an inherently pluralistic aspect to this approach. The Chicago Women's Club helped create local associations and promoted the establishment of community centers on the basis of "an understanding of the city as the sum of its neighborhoods." Cognizant that urban heterogeneity had a geographic dimension, the Club envisioned the city as a range of communities rather than a singular entity, a method that paralleled the approach of decentralized party organizations. The idea was to empower people at the local level, where they could make their varied needs and desires known more effectively than they could at a citywide level. Most important, this approach implicitly acknowledged that the leaders of the CWC could not simply speak for the city as a whole.[38]

Clubwomen sought to encourage democratic interchanges in other contexts as well. Activist women employed what Daphne Spain has labeled a "voluntary vernacular" to create spaces open to workers, immigrants, African Americans, and single women, a democratic impulse that ran counter to conventional (and male-dominated) urban development. A key rationale for the push for parks and playgrounds, a staple of women's social reformism during the Progressive Era, was to establish informal settings in which people from different backgrounds could encounter each other and learn to cooperate. Open to all, such settings would teach children to overcome class and ethnic tensions through play. Reformers hoped such experiences would impart vital civic lessons in an urban order cleaved by such differences. Some park advocates, such as Chicago's Mary McDowell, called for the construction of field houses that could serve as venues for both recreation and civic discussion. Such settings would be neutral ground, marked by a decorum and openness absent from the partisan ward halls and saloons where political business customarily transpired.[39]

McDowell's proposal reflected a fundamental goal of the campaign to create spaces and institutions for civic discussion. They would make possible an alternative way of conducting public business, displacing both the smoke-filled rooms in the back of saloons where bosses operated and the corporate boardrooms sealed off from the public where businessmen reformers met. If decision making could take place in settings accessible to all, workers, immigrants, and minorities would be able to express their views and exert greater influence on public affairs. A civic life rooted in that kind of deliberation would not require direction from either party bosses or the "best men."

The rejection of the era's conventional forms of civic leadership pointed to a key weakness in these plans. Like most of the era's reformers, clubwomen assumed that the formation of public sentiment was sufficient. Yet even if enough of these democratic spaces could be established, they did not ensure that the

public opinion that formed in them could be translated into public policy. It remained necessary to devise formal mechanisms to turn the desires and demands of a deliberating public into legislation. A handful of the most creative reformers, both female and male, would formulate ideas and institutions to accomplish that end. The initial democratic innovations put forth by women's clubs would provide a platform to launch their efforts.

It is important not to overstate the democratic character of women's urban activism during the Progressive Era. For all their inclusive rhetoric, women's clubs remained exclusive organizations. The CWC capped its membership at 1,200 in 1912, a very modest number in a city of over two million. Membership in the group was possible only through nomination and a vetting process that determined an applicant's "fitness" to serve. Dues were high as well, reaching $20 per year plus a $35 initiation fee in 1912, sums that no working-class women could afford.[40] The WCC had lower dues and local branches that made it more accessible, but it still struggled to engage working-class and ethnic women. The local branch in Ward 19, home of Hull House, had thirteen members, eight of whom were from the settlement. Branches in other poor wards had comparable profiles.[41] Boston's Women's Municipal League encountered similar difficulties in attracting lower-class members, and women whose names appeared in the society register remained its dominant group. Its decision to hold a summer meeting at the Eastern Yacht Club in the fashionable coastal town of Marblehead was but one indication of its social character.[42]

The failure to penetrate to the grass roots consistently led women's clubs at times to substitute education for collaboration. Such an approach cast working-class women as pupils to be taught rather than as equals with ideas that might shape a club's agenda. The Central Municipal Citizenship Committee of Chicago's WCC, charged with teaching immigrant women about American civics, arranged for hundreds of lectures in schools, ward buildings, and a handful of women's clubs and factories. In 1914 it distributed 104,000 "catechisms," including 25,000 in foreign languages. Even the name of these documents conveyed the leadership's method, which was to inculcate values in their readers rather than to develop a reciprocal relationship across social boundaries.[43] The Women's Municipal League made a point of welcoming women of all backgrounds at its founding, but its first president also noted that some women would need to be educated "to a comprehension of their civic responsibilities."[44]

Ironically, the idea that women of all backgrounds shared certain common experiences may have blinded some middle-class reformers to the salience of social differences. Though clearly cognizant of class and cultural divisions and committed to inclusion, leaders of women's clubs were quick to ascribe to all women certain "moral instincts" or "underlying interests." Some of that rhetoric

may have been strategic, a way of conforming outwardly to the prevailing assumptions about women's nature. Yet in some instances it may also have led to the expectation that women of all backgrounds would come together readily. When that did not happen, it was easier to turn to educational methods than to undertake the hard work of collaboration.

Even when actions did not match rhetoric, the work of clubwomen represented an important, subtle challenge to the political status quo. Simply by engaging with workers and immigrants and seeking to empower their communities, women's clubs fostered a more inclusive, democratic civic life. Unburdened by masculine expectations that valued aggression over sympathy and conflict over cooperation, they edged toward a vision of public life that departed substantially from the one in which party politics operated. Perhaps only the most astute among them recognized how difficult it was to build a political order along these lines. But the growth of women's involvement in urban public life unquestionably made it easier to imagine such changes.

The clearest signal that the feminine challenge to masculine politics mattered was the growing momentum of the woman suffrage movement. By the 1910s states began to allow women to vote, and passage of the Nineteenth Amendment at the end of that decade granted suffrage rights nationally. The presence of clubwomen and other female reformers in public was an essential precursor to that development; because of this presence, the argument that women ought to be able to exercise power was increasingly credible. The expansion of state responsibilities to include supposedly female duties such as care for the poor added credence to the suffragist argument that empowering women would bring social improvement.

Yet woman suffrage represented something more than the addition of another group to the voting rolls. The inclusion of women in the body politic implied a fuller introduction of such feminine qualities as cooperation and dialogue into public life. It made it more difficult to assert that politics was a form of manly conflict. Such masculine formations did not fade away entirely as women gained full citizenship rights, but the mere presence of women in the public square made alternative understandings of how politics worked more viable.

Nobody understood the significance of expanding women's power better than Jane Addams. The crude disparagement she provoked with her challenge to Johnny Powers was but one of many instances in which she faced criticism for failing to act like a woman. It was perhaps this sort of attack she had in mind when she penned a tongue-in-cheek brief supporting woman suffrage for the *Ladies' Home Journal.* Titled "If Men Were Seeking the Franchise," it imagined a society in which women, not men, had monopolized the right to vote because

people had long recognized that "the development of the State had closely followed that of the Family." Government's principal functions were "the nurture and education of children and the protection of the weak, sick, and aged." Empowering men in such a context raised several objections. The "most valid" was that men were "so fond of fighting," and "always have been since [they] were little boys," that they were likely to forget that "the real object of the State is to nurture and protect life." Writing in 1913, Addams was especially concerned with militarism—she noted that the predilection for combat would lead men to spend "huge sums of money for battleships"—but the wider implications of the point remained clear. The masculine notion of politics as conflict was ill-suited to a modern industrial society in which care and protection mattered so much. Likewise, the tendency of men to "exalt business profit above human life" indicated that it would be "sheer folly to give them the franchise." In this satirical form Addams put her finger on the most radical aspects of the era's feminine challenge to masculine politics. Activist women did not propose to end the gender distinctions that defined politics so much as to turn them on their head.[45]

This subversive thrust prompted urban party politicians to defend themselves. They did so in part by doubling down on their own manliness, stressing their masculine authority, competitive nature, and business acumen as necessary for preserving order in a rapidly industrializing society. This conception had its roots in the rationale for party politics formulated during the nineteenth century, but it became especially sharp after 1890, as women's activism intensified. Yet politicians also began to incorporate a degree of traditional femininity into their personae, citing the influence of mothers, wives, and daughters. Such inspiration encouraged them to support public assistance to the poor and even to cooperate with female reformers in pursuit of social reform.

But most men were willing to go only so far. When politicians accommodated and even collaborated with activist women, they did so to shore up political support from working-class and ethnic voters. Few were ready to accept the feminine vision of politics as a deliberative process infused with sympathy for opposing views. They remained wedded to the idea of politics as competition. It would remain for a few Progressive reformers to build on the innovations of activist women and craft a fully formed conception of inclusive, deliberative democracy for an urban-industrial society.

5

IN DEFENSE OF PROFESSIONAL POLITICS

When the middle-class readers of the *North American Review* settled into their armchairs with the magazine's February 1892 issue, they were likely startled to find an article by Richard Croker defending Tammany Hall. It was an unusual place for such an author and such an argument. The *Review*, a literary venue for the cultural elite of the Gilded Age, had been among a handful of publications at the forefront of the campaign for political reform during the 1870s and 1880s. A one-time street tough and prizefighter of limited education, Croker hardly fit the usual profile of its contributors. He had risen through Tammany's ranks and was now its leader. The magazine's willingness to open its pages to him—or, as some suspected, one of his better-educated colleagues writing for him—reflected nationwide interest in urban public life and particularly in the political battles unfolding in New York City.[1]

Though unexpected, Croker's desire to justify Tammany in those pages made sense at that moment. By 1892, municipal reformers had stepped up their attacks on the organization and its leaders. Godkin had reprinted his *Tammany Biographies*, the Reverend Charles Parkhurst had launched an attention-grabbing crusade against Tammany and vice, and anti-machine activists were gaining support. Their depiction of urban party politicians as thuggish denizens of the urban underworld had taken hold in many quarters of the city, peeling away middle-class New Yorkers from the Democratic Party coalition and threatening Tammany rule. Contrary to his reputation as a semiliterate brute whose success flowed from his fists, Croker was in fact a savvy publicist who understood that Tammany needed support in respectable quarters to sustain its

FIGURE 13. The Tammany Hall portrait of Richard Croker, which hung in the organization's well-appointed headquarters. Croker and other bosses worked constantly to burnish their image as respectable leaders engaged in a legitimate business—politics. Alfred Henry Lewis, *Richard Croker* (Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 1901), 106.

legitimacy and its electoral advantage. Publishing a vindication of the machine in the *North American Review* offered Croker a chance to reach middle-class voters more readily than would conventional means of partisan communication.[2]

The article's argument rested on a portrayal of politics as a form of intellectual and even physical conflict that benefited society as a whole. To advance his claim, Croker mixed masculine rhetoric and Darwinism. Comparing a party organization to an army, Croker asserted that "politics is war" and as such was not different from other competitive activities. "Chess is war; business is war; the rivalry of students and of athletes is war," he insisted, "everything is war in which men strive for mastery and power as against other men, and this is one of the essential conditions of progress." Tammany, like any other "well organized political club," was "made for the purpose of aggressive warfare." The struggles it engaged in strengthened it and ensured its suitability for the environment in which it worked. Thus it was best viewed as an "organism," the "natural growth of the system of selection." Its position of power flowed from its ability to triumph over its adversaries for close to a century, a process of competition and evolution that made Tammany the fittest institution for governing New York City.[3]

Evidently aware that such a vision of politics might not pass muster with genteel readers, Croker sold it by playing to their fears. In an era of labor upheaval he appealed to the *Review*'s audience in class terms by locating his organization on the respectable side of the line that divided dangerous agitation from law-abiding citizenship. A battle-tested Tammany, he implied, served as a bulwark against radicalism. Contrasting his disciplined machine with a "mob," he argued that such a well-run political organization was comparable to a "drilled and compacted battalion…animated and supported by purpose and scientific plan." Even "a single company" was able to "quell almost any popular outbreak in a city," and "a regiment is completely master of the situation." It was possible, he warned, for "local political organizations composed largely of depraved men of revolutionary tendencies" to act effectively, necessitating a counterforce of equal discipline and power.

For providing such services, Croker thought he and his peers deserved the same standing and wealth as a successful businessman. The collapsing of the distinction between public and private was at the heart of the defense of professional politics he offered. For New York's boss, politics was a competitive, respectable field of endeavor, comparable to private enterprise, not the elevated moral realm peopled by the well-educated, gentlemen leaders that municipal reformers craved. The maintenance of a large, complex organization devoted to the preservation of social order and governing "the largest municipal constituency on the planet, except one," required men of talent. "The task is clearly one of enormous magnitude, and demands a combination of skill, enterprise, knowledge, resolution, and what is known as executive ability." Any member of Tammany's Executive Committee—the twenty-four district leaders who ostensibly ran the organization—was "a citizen of repute, always a man of good ability and executive training." To attract such men required fair pay. "The affairs of a vast

community are to be administered," Croker wrote. "Skillful men must administer them. These men must be compensated. The principle is precisely the same as that which governs the workings of a railway, or a bank, or a factory."

This essay was but one example of an ongoing public-relations offensive Croker undertook in support of bosses and machines. He was acutely aware of the necessity of defending Tammany from its critics and conscious of how to take advantage of the new journalism of the late nineteenth century and the culture of celebrity it had provoked. To this end, he oversaw the creation of the *Tammany Times* newspaper in 1893, spoke with apparent frankness before various investigative commissions, submitted to interviews with sympathetic journalists, arranged for the publication of a friendly history of the organization, and cooperated with popular writer Alfred Henry Lewis in the production of his own autobiography. By the turn of the century his was a household name and his face was easily recognized by millions of magazine and newspaper readers around the country, attributes that helped him publicize his defense of machine politics.

Other politicians followed suit, particularly as reformers of both sexes began to challenge machines more aggressively. Supposedly taciturn figures such as Boston's Martin Lomasney, Philadelphia's Israel Durham, Cincinnati's George Cox, and Tammany leader Charles Murphy (Croker's successor) suddenly proved willing to articulate justifications for themselves and their organizations in print. Tammany district leader George Washington Plunkitt collaborated with journalist William Riordon to produce an extended defense of boss politics. In Boston the young James Michael Curley proved extraordinarily adept at shaping popular conceptions of his political actions through sophisticated manipulation of press coverage. He even turned a conviction for fraud (he and a colleague were caught taking a civil service exam in the place of two less literate constituents) into an affirmative defense of patronage politics. Employing the phrase "he did it for a friend," Curley managed not only to capture a seat on the Board of Aldermen but also to advance the argument that politics was more a matter of delivering concrete assistance than obeisance to abstract legalities.[4]

The rationale for urban party politics these bosses presented echoed Croker's essay. It had four interrelated parts. The first was an insistence that politics was a respectable business and that its leading practitioners should be regarded much as any other successful entrepreneur. Second, it depicted public life as a fiercely competitive arena out of which evolved the men and organizations best suited for leadership. In this respect it worked in much the same way that the ferocious economic struggles of the Gilded Age generated suitable captains of industry and powerful corporations. The emphasis on conflict underscored the third key aspect of the rationale for machine politics, its masculine character. Aggressive, forceful manliness enabled politicians to assert their will over an otherwise chaotic social

order and in particular equipped them to turn away radical threats and preserve capitalism. This emphasis on the defense of the status quo puts in context the final element of the bosses' self-defense, their generosity to the poor. Claiming a feminine inspiration that softened the hard masculine image they projected, politicians and their apologists argued that they provided help to the urban immigrant poor in an intimate, neighborly fashion. A reputation for such munificence served two ends. Not only did it attract lower-class voting support; it also reminded the middle-class electorate of the boss's ability to placate the poor and divert them from revolution. Positioning themselves as brokers straddling the class and cultural divisions that pervaded urban life, machine politicians claimed that their vigorous, expert leadership was indispensable to a stable, capitalist order.

Big-city bosses did not formulate this argument from scratch. They drew on well-established arguments and themes in crafting their defense. Although by the late nineteenth century the two major parties provided the dominant means of pursuing power, they had nevertheless faced a steady stream of criticism that put them consistently on the defensive. Martin Van Buren, who more than any other politician conceived of and justified the modern mass party and whose *Inquiry into the Origin and Course of Political Parties in the United States* appeared posthumously in 1867, had established the essential principles of this defense. Parties managed social conflict, promoted civic loyalty, and checked personal ambition through discipline, he avowed. During the later part of the century, politicians still readily employed these arguments, supplementing them with gendered rhetoric that characterized reformers as effeminate—"man milliners," in one memorable phrase—and a Darwinian emphasis on the benefits of social and political conflict. Urban politicians offered a sharpened version of this defense, arguing that they alone were prepared to keep the order necessary to ensure property rights and promote business.[5]

Such a formulation left little room for republican notions of the common good. The ideal of citizens reasoning together from a shared fund of values and of selfless leaders acting in the best interest of the whole community had no place in the political vision of urban party bosses, which owed more to liberal concepts of competition and individualism. Croker and his contemporaries had little need even to pay lip service to those ideals in the fashion of such predecessors as Fernando Wood. There were, as one journalist put it, "no ethical considerations" involved in fin-de-siècle urban politics.[6] It was simply a matter of effective management. Politicians and their apologists presented big-city public life as a roiling scene filled with frequently violent clashes among groups and interests that shared no common cultural ground. Such an environment demanded vigorous, pragmatic management that preserved the capitalist status quo, a form of leadership that bosses insisted only they could deliver.

The claims of party bosses alone were not enough to sustain such an argument. Only when confirmed and augmented by a range of observers did they begin to stick. Journalists, reformers, social scientists, and even novelists sketched portraits of boss politics that dovetailed with views expressed by politicians themselves. Often politicians cooperated with these outsiders, encouraging them to portray the machine and its leaders in sympathetic terms. Drawing from and partaking in the era's intellectual and cultural trends, these apologists for the machine stressed the necessity of boss politics as a means of keeping order in the polyglot city. Picking up where Gilded Age critics such as E. L. Godkin and James Bryce left off, they cast themselves as objective observers offering empirical findings instead of moral outrage.

Often the intent of these commentators was not to back the boss but rather to instruct reformers in the best ways of removing him. The idea was to avoid moralistic condemnation and to focus on exactly how this form of politics operated. Armed with that knowledge, anti-machine forces could devise more effective means of pursuing reform. "It is not within the province of this article to consider Tammany Hall from an ethical viewpoint," one journalist declared, "but to show the secret of its power, which is known to few people not directly concerned with New York politics."[7] Such accounts offered at least a hint of sensationalism—the revelation of the secret workings of the machine—but also purported to provide a realistic, empirical assessment. Some of these neutral accounts gave special weight to the social services provided by the boss, an emphasis which encouraged political reformers to do the same and which made generosity a key element in popular (and later scholarly) understandings of machine politics.

The result of these arguments was not the complete rehabilitation of machine methods but the establishment of a familiar argument in their favor. The machine remained a favorite target of reformers during the Progressive Era, and magazines and newspapers continued to issue condemnations of it at a steady clip. But enough politicians, journalists, reformers, and novelists characterized the nature of urban public life in similar terms—as the professional management of a contentious urban society rather than the ethical pursuit of the common good—that the defense of professional politics gained some purchase on the American political imagination. The penetration of the motifs and arguments that justified boss politics into popular fiction in particular reflected just how widely they had spread. Not everyone portrayed the machine in this way, but enough did to sustain bosses and machines—and the liberal, pluralist assumptions about politics and society that undergird them—well into the twentieth century.[8]

Debates about city politics turned on issues of class and respectability. The animating purpose of municipal reform was to challenge the partisan loyalties of

middle-class voters. Male groups depicted machine politicians as men of lower-class origins engaged in disreputable activity, a strategy aimed at peeling away bourgeois partisans. Activist women, casting themselves as moral agents above politics, reinforced the claim that party bosses were depraved leaders with no claim on the support of respectable members of either party. Many of these campaigns, such as the sensational anti-vice crusades of the Reverend Charles Parkhurst in New York during the early 1890s, sought to convince upright voters of all parties to band together to oust the machine and elect responsible leaders.[9]

A strategy predicated on rallying the bourgeois represented a substantial threat to urban machines. Middle-class voters constituted an essential element of the electoral coalition for each party. While the urban working class was the Democratic Party's core constituency in the North, it also relied on upwardly mobile Irish Catholics and Germans, as well as merchants and businessmen attracted to its low tariff agenda. Republicans attracted support from some immigrants, but their primary constituency was the native-born, Protestant middle class. If reformers could persuade enough "respectable" voters to desert their parties and to support an anti-machine candidate, municipal reform groups would become viable alternatives to mainstream party organizations.

Fortunately for party bosses, mobilizing the middle class was a more complex matter than most reformers realized. Definitions of class and respectability were flexible, and the effort to win middle-class support was more than a simple exercise in capturing the votes of an already self-conscious segment of the population. Stephanie Foote has argued that Tammany sought to represent people who were self-consciously different, who did not conform to the prevailing middle-class ideal. She is right to a point; Tammany operatives and their counterparts in other cities distinguished themselves from the vision of bourgeois respectability that reformers had in mind. But they did not reject the notion of respectability altogether. What urban politicians understood was that an appeal to the "respectable" portion of the population did not have to target precisely the same people as good-government activists did. The "middle class" was a broad, fluid category, encompassing small shopkeepers, foremen, and clerical workers of working-class background, as well as prosperous corporate managers, professionals, and substantial property owners. So diverse a collection of people proved difficult to lump together in a meaningful way. While reform literature defined its audience by appealing to bourgeois prejudice against the working class, Richard Croker and his peers would seek to identify themselves—and by extension their audience—as workingmen who had climbed the socioeconomic ladder, had entered respectable fields (including politics), and had not forgotten where they came from. From that position, they claimed, they were well prepared to mediate the tensions and conflicts that had arisen in urban-industrial life.[10]

Pursuing middle-class votes did not mean that bosses abandoned the working class. They still provided favors in the form of patronage and other assistance to the urban poor in exchange for votes. But as a number of scholars have demonstrated, there was not enough patronage to go around and bosses had difficulty placating the many new immigrants flowing into cities around the turn of the century. They had to work hard to maintain a reputation for generosity to the needy through publicity because they lacked the capacity to help all or even most of the urban poor. Generating such an image served them well on two fronts: it convinced many blue-collar voters that the bosses cared for them, and it assured middle-class voters that bosses could retain workers' loyalty and steer them away from radicalism.[11]

Given the complexities of political leadership, bosses contended that it should be seen as something comparable to running a business and as deserving of the same respect. Croker's insistence that leading Tammany was no different than managing a railroad, bank, or factory was but one of many such claims. It was in this context that he could famously declare during an investigative hearing that "we expect to be permitted to make a living" and that Tammany leaders were "working for their own pocket…all the time, every day of the week, the same as you are" without any sign of embarrassment. An article in *Munsey's* made much the same point, arguing forthrightly that Tammany was "an association of men who make a business of politics. They devote three hundred and sixty-five days a year to it."[12]

Tammany district leader George Washington Plunkitt offered a more colloquial expression of this point. "After goin' through the apprenticeship of the business while I was a boy by workin' around the district headquarters and hustlin' about the polls on election day, I set out when I cast my first vote to win fame and money in New York city politics." To make his way, he obtained "some marketable goods"—votes—which he could bring to the party leaders. These commodities got him started, earning him "bids" from several rival factions and making him a "risin' man in politics." It was this conception of politics as business that provided the basis for Plunkitt's famous declaration that reformers were short-lived "morning glories." They had not been "trained" for it, he argued. "The fact is that a reformer can't last in politics, he can make a show for while, but he always comes down like a rocket. Politics is as much a regular business as the grocery or the dry-goods or the drug business. You've got to be trained up to it or you're sure to fall."[13]

Politicians and their supporters in other cities echoed Plunkitt. Philadelphia's Israel Durham insisted that "politics is a business, and if you are going to dominate politics, you have to give up everything else and cleave to that only." A sympathetic journalist writing about Boston's Martin Lomasney explained that "the

recipe is simple. Lomasney makes a business of politics. He follows it 24 hours a day. He devotes the same thought and energy to politics that a successful man devotes to business." Such claims were usually offered as explanations of why politicians succeeded while reformers, who imagined themselves citizen politicians rather than professionals, usually failed. "Evening politicians," as James Michael Curley derisively called them, had day jobs and engaged in political activity only as an after-work avocation; they did not devote themselves to politics sufficiently and thus lacked the expertise it required.[14]

Outside observers bolstered this view of politics. In an extended essay titled *Politics in a Democracy,* Wall Street banker and amateur philosopher Daniel Greenleaf Thompson argued in 1893 that late nineteenth-century American politics had reached a stage that required what he called "government by syndicate." This arrangement, in which "compact, well-organized bodies, controlled like a business house and established on the commercial principle of undertaking government of a city as a matter of business," dominated civic affairs, best suited the current social and political circumstances of the United States. The complexity of urban-industrial life, racial and class differences, and the limited intellectual capacity of most voters required the businesslike governing style that had emerged in cities such as New York.[15]

The emphasis on the commercial character of urban public life in Thompson's analysis led to a defense of the profit motive as an animating force in politics. He readily cast aside traditional notions of civic obligation and concern for the common good. Politics was at its heart a business and the politician a businessman. "The fundamental idea of this sort of combination is a private interest.... The animating spirit at bottom is a commercial one," he declared. "The syndicate is a business combination for business ends. Those ends are to make money by giving civil administration." What made this democratic were the commercial pressures that any business faced. Turning voters into customers, Thompson argued that a political machine must perform well to make a profit and stay in business.[16]

If politics was a legitimate business, it followed that it deserved respect and that its leading practitioners were respectable. Big-city politicians worked assiduously to make this argument during the 1880s and 1890s. Some urban party leaders, such as William Stokely of Philadelphia, William Flynn and Christopher Magee in Pittsburgh, and Tammany's John Kelly, strove to present themselves as respectable leaders, and their organizations routinely nominated for mayor prominent, upright figures who had not played significant roles in the organization, a practice that continued into the twentieth century. A man of working-class origins who had prospered in politics and married the niece of a New York Roman Catholic prelate, Kelly in particular devoted a great deal of effort to burnishing his credentials as a reformer and a symbol of Irish Catholic respectability.[17]

Tammany engaged in a particularly noteworthy effort to enhance the organization's social character at the grass roots. During the late 1880s it began to establish a network of local clubs modeled on middle-class fraternal groups. These new year-round bodies replaced the older district organizations, which usually formed at the start of election season and disbanded once votes had been cast. The idea for the clubs arose with Henry Purroy, a Tammany District leader from the Bronx, who modeled his "Tammany Society" on the workingmen's organizations that had attracted both working- and middle-class votes for Henry George's mayoral candidacy in 1886. These clubs, as Martin Shefter has argued, were designed to attract white-collar supporters, particularly the growing body of second-generation, lace-curtain Irish in New York, to Tammany. In the past voters like these had backed rival factions such as the Swallow-Tails (whose class-inflected name derived from the formal evening wear they supposedly favored) or supported Henry George. The district clubs were organized like "any social, benevolent, or fraternal organization" such as the Elks or Masons. A typical headquarters in the Tenth Assembly District contrasted markedly with the murky saloons that had served as political headquarters in prior decades. It included not only political paraphernalia, such as posters and photographs of prominent officeholders, but a "well appointed library" that was used regularly by local residents. "Any evening one can see any number of men poring over the books," the *Tammany Times* reported in 1893. Tammany established these clubs in all the city's Assembly Districts, and it aggressively promoted their development during the 1890s. By the early twentieth century such clubs were models of masculine middle-class decorum—their proceedings governed by formal constitutions and their activities a far cry from the stereotypical smoke-filled room in the back of a saloon.[18]

Perhaps the most common means of claiming respectability was through biographies. E. L. Godkin had asserted that city politicians feared nothing so much as a biography, but in fact they found it an indispensable form of propaganda in the face of reform criticism. Profiles of candidates had been a staple of political campaigns for as long as the republic had existed, but the intensification of municipal reform prompted an outpouring of personal sketches. When Cincinnati's George Cox faced a threat from reformers, his response included an autobiography that emphasized his business success, his tranquil domestic life, and his political honesty. Likewise, when the Bowery's "Big Tim" Sullivan faced charges of corruption, he delivered a rousing life history on the floor of the state legislature. No Tammany publication, whether the *Tammany Times,* a souvenir program from a Fourth of July celebration, or Euphemia Vale Blake's sympathetic *History of the Tammany Society,* failed to include short biographies of leading figures in the organization. One of the chief purposes of the creation

of a Tammany newspaper in 1893 was to counter the impression conveyed by Godkin's hostile *Tammany Biographies.* The *Times* featured short profiles of Assembly District leaders and national party figures each week during its initial run. By the end of 1893 it had published a compilation of these sketches in book form, mixing biographies of Grover Cleveland and other national leaders with portraits of Croker, Purroy, and Sullivan.[19]

Many of these biographies relied on a rags-to-riches—or more precisely, to respectability—narrative. William Stokely, William Flynn, John Kelly, Richard Croker, Tim Sullivan, George Cox, Martin Lomasney, and James Michael Curley were among the numerous politicians who, like the businessmen of the day, defined themselves as self-made men. All except Cox and Croker had lost their fathers at a young age, and a standard element of their life stories was their struggle to help their mothers make ends meet. Even Cox stressed his family's poverty, which required him to leave school as a young man to take work. Some politicians came from comfortable backgrounds, but the more common story was one in which a strong work ethic propelled a man up the socioeconomic ladder.[20]

The theme of the self-made man was especially prominent in the slew of biographies generated by Tammany's publicity apparatus. A sketch of Sullivan portrayed him in classic Horatio Alger terms, as a newsboy made good. Another Tammany leader, Henry Drew, was a machinist turned inventor, a "busy man" who nonetheless found time for public life and the "study of political economy." Ninth Assembly District boss James W. Boyle was "a hard working, self reliant" man who had risen from humble origins to become a prominent oyster dealer before entering politics. Local leader Thomas J. Dunn began his adult life as a stonecutter, "kept pegging away and saved his money," and ultimately became a proprietor of a stoneyard and a contracting business. The *Times* introduced George Washington Plunkitt, later "Plunkitt of Tammany Hall," to its readers as another poor boy made good. A few years later the paper described him as a man who started as a butcher's apprentice and who was now "worth a million." Almost every friendly account of Richard Croker, including Alfred Henry Lewis's biography, proudly cited both his humble origins and his considerable wealth.[21]

An emphasis on modest backgrounds was part of Tammany's balancing act. The organization sought middle-class support and the legitimacy and electoral success that came with it, but it had to be careful not to offend working-class voters. It did so by routinely emphasizing not only the business ability and financial triumphs of party leaders but also their bonhomie and lack of pretense. Thomas Dunn's sketch was a case in point. His success in politics stemmed not just from skills he displayed in business, the *Tammany Times* noted, but also because he was a "good natured young man, generous and true to his friends, and with a level head." Even after financial and political triumphs, there was "no difference

except well and hard earned wealth between Tommy Dunn the stonecutter and Thomas J. Dunn, the successful businessman." Plunkitt made a similar point when he advised would-be politicians to "avoid a dress suit."[22]

These Alger-style accounts implied that success in private enterprise was almost indistinguishable from success in public life. Dunn's profile emphasized his "hard work and sterling business principles," which explained both his financial and political triumphs. James Boyle's business and political achievements "proved the well known truth that a man who is successful in his own private affairs is always the best leader and director of men." One of many profiles of Plunkitt noted that it was "common talk among the boys that if ex-Senator Plunkitt had gone into the railroad business in his early youth he would today be one of the great corporation magnates of the time." Such claims also served to blur the lines between private and public life, between business and politics, and implied that politics was a business itself.[23]

The most successful city politicians put their wealth on display in a manner designed to claim social prestige. Pittsburgh's William Flynn, who began his adult life as a pipefitter and ward boss and earned his fortune through city contracts steered to his construction firm, purchased a palatial home (which the family named "Braeman") and earned a listing in Pittsburgh's Social Register. His equally wealthy political partner, Christopher Magee, purchased his own estate, which he named "The Maples." James Michael Curley bought a handsome house at a fashionable address in Boston's Jamaica Plain district. (Anxious to signal his loyalty to the city's Irish masses, he carved shamrocks in the shutters.) Almost comically, Richard Croker evoked memories of the Tweed Ring's sumptuous Americus Club when the one-time street tough and gang leader retired—or fled scandal and defeat—to the life of a landed gentleman in England, where he bred racehorses on his country estate.[24]

There was also a visual dimension to the pursuit of respectability. Although portraits, cartoons, and other forms of visual propaganda were well-established elements of political communication, the development of technologies to reproduce photographs made visual imagery even more salient by the 1890s. Photos, as opposed to lithographs or paintings, lent a realism to graphic displays and gave them added authority. Posed photographs became a key weapon in the communicative arsenal of the politician, and party tracts and party newspapers were littered with formal portraits. One effect of these displays was to counter the popular images of machine politicians as lower-class, often simian figures that were a regular feature of cartoons in the popular press. As a friendly biographer of John Kelly had explained, "the author has been at much pains to procure good pictures of Mr. Kelly. The caricaturists have taken so many liberties with his face, and presented it in so many ridiculous lights, that public curiosity is felt

in every part of the United States to know exactly how John Kelly does look in *propria persona*."[25]

No politician required such visual intervention more than Richard Croker. The subject of so many caricatures that he privately published a collection of cartoons in which he was featured, Croker was commonly depicted as an ape-like bully in a gaudy checked suit, the hairy knuckles of his fists scraping the ground. In fact, the Tammany boss, who aspired to the life of an English country gentleman, gravitated toward stylish clothing and worked to project a polished image. Numerous portraits of him in respectable attire, gazing clear-eyed into the camera, served to counter the less flattering representations and to reinforce his claims to respectability (Figure 13).[26]

Tammany took other steps to bolster an image of respectability as well. Some were transparent, such as the portrayals of saloon keepers (and district leaders) Charles Murphy and John Purcell as "proprietors" of "cafés." Others were more effective, such as the release of Euphemia Vale Blake's *History of the Tammany Society.* Blake had had difficulty publishing her manuscript because it reportedly treated Tammany in neutral fashion. Only when Croker intervened was it printed, and then only after the Tammany boss had her rewrite the book to his satisfaction. Finally published in 1901, Blake's history presented Tammany as a reputable institution that had governed wisely and effectively, with the exception of the aberrant Tweed episode. One amusing anecdote summed up the book's emphasis on respectability: a visitor to the county clerk's office was pleased to find a "smoking prohibited here" sign and "gentlemanly looking clerks." He assumed the Republicans were in charge, particularly because "a citizen was civilly treated here now." When a deputy clerk informed him "that all the gentlemen at these desks are members of Tammany Hall," he fled wordlessly. Blake's purpose, and the larger goal of her book, was to undercut assumptions about the disreputable character of Tammany drawn from "vituperation" in the popular press.[27]

Blake's book pointed to another element of politicians' self-defense. In its first line it declared that "when a Society or Institution has been in active operation for over a century it is pertinent to inquire wherein lies its vitality." On the following page she noted again the Tammany Society's "apparently indestructible vitality." Such claims not only drew on Tammany's endurance but rendered it a living organism. In that respect Blake followed her patron, Croker, who several years earlier in the *North American Review* had insisted that "I do not propose to defend the Tammany organization; neither do I propose to defend the sunrise as an exhibition of celestial mechanics." Both depicted Tammany as an inevitable phenomenon, a rhetorical move that implied that the organization was a product of social evolution. If the machine metaphor suggested inorganic

authority, these claims cast machine politics as a natural, and thus wholly legitimate, development.[28]

In turning to Darwin, politicians not only neutralized the racialist contentions of liberal reformers; they also latched on to one of most important rationales offered by apologists for the rapacious capitalism (and capitalists) of the Gilded Age. Social Darwinism typically supported the status quo, justifying vast differences in wealth and power as by-products of a process of natural selection. It was a flexible concept, one that could do the bidding of reformers seeking to discredit boss rule and bosses aiming to justify their own authority. Americans used it indiscriminately to explain the ascent or decline of individuals, groups, and institutions. Politicians turned to it just as businessmen did, as a justification of their success and the dominance of their organizations.[29]

Croker's 1893 essay in the *North American Review* was among the first to use Darwinism to defend the machine, but another part of the turn-of-the-century Tammany publicity blitz exploited the rationale more fully. Alfred Henry Lewis's *Richard Croker,* a book-length biography of the Tammany boss, relied heavily on Darwinian concepts to explain how and why Croker had risen to power and why Tammany was so successful. Better remembered for his western fiction, Lewis was a prolific, sensational journalist who worked for the Hearst newspaper chain and for a time edited his own paper, *The Verdict.* He was a confidant of Croker as well, and it appears that the two collaborated on the biography, which was billed as "the only authorized biography of the great Democratic chieftain." A literary critic has dismissed Lewis's western fiction as characterized by an "immutable determinism" and "oppressive Social Darwinism," and his treatment of Croker took a comparable approach. Although too jumbled to place its subject in a clear and consistent framework, Lewis's biography relied heavily on evolution to explain both Croker in particular and Tammany-style machine politics in general.[30]

Following a tendency of his friend, Theodore Roosevelt, Lewis also mixed masculine claims into his Darwinian analysis. Croker, like Roosevelt, was the product of a strenuous life that had prepared him for the battles of politics. Humans were a "race of violence," Lewis contended. Men such as Croker had abilities that gave him an advantage in physical clashes. Croker's rough upbringing on the streets of New York, his experience as a prizefighter, and his physical prowess were demonstrations of his fitness to lead, and his rise to prominence was the result of his use of these "powers native to himself." Thumbing his nose at reformers and their pursuit of socially respectable leaders, Lewis declared that "physical stamina and courage" was "the first requisite of your best man" because such powers were necessary for the "actual, physical conflict" that characterized human existence. "To the ear of our Mugwump-moralist this will trench on savagery," Lewis added,

but it was a truth that could not be avoided. Croker was fit to lead in a way that effeminate, physically weak men—including reformers—were not.[31]

Evolution helped explain not only the rise of particular types of men in public life but also the emergence of machine politics itself. Echoing liberal reformers, Lewis argued that Tammany was, in its "best flourishings and flowerings…indigenous to urban soil." The machine was not "artificial" but a "product of conditions" with a "vitality inborn and of itself." Such politics were inevitable in a city, he averred, because the "seeds of the 'machine' were in the natural man. Hive or herd him into a city and behold the swelling and the bursting and the sprouting of that seed." Lewis's organic imagery implied that the machine had survived a process of natural selection to emerge as the political method most suited to the urban environment.[32]

Cincinnati boss George Cox made a similar argument a few years later, albeit in more prosaic language. Prompted by a particularly effective reform campaign against him, Cox penned a short autobiography in 1905. In addition to the standard elements of the era's urban political biographies—impoverished upbringing, physical abilities, and honesty—Cox offered a Darwinian take on the boss. "In the first place," he wrote, "I want to say that a boss is evolved—not self made. He is a product of evolution—a natural product of American political life." The process of selection resulted in the elevation of "the men best fitted to leadership." "In the old days strength and physical prowess were the chief attributes of the successful leader or boss, to-day the ability to control men is the most essential quality." For that reason, desire for power was not sufficient, or even necessary, to gain power. "I had no ambition to become a boss," Cox claimed, defusing charges that he had selfish motives. It was because of his "peculiar fitness" that he "evolved into a boss."[33]

Journalists joined in presenting the boss as a product of evolution, sometimes in less-than-subtle fashion. When William Stead described the boss as a "natural product of the elemental forces of his time" or Hartley Davis labeled him a prime example of "the doctrine of the 'survival of the fittest,'" they implied that such men achieved power less through personal dishonesty than through a more neutral, natural process. The popular writer William Allen White took this approach to an extreme in a profile of Richard Croker in a 1901 issue of *McClure's*. Like many journalists, his intent was to foster more effective opposition to machine politics by presenting the most objective view possible. Casting himself as a scientist studying the evolution of Croker and his organization in much the same way that a biologist might examine a bird, White claimed that his intent was "to collect and set down all the data available about the man Croker; to find his family, genus, and species."[34]

White's analysis produced a Darwinian portrait that bordered on parody. He presented Croker in heavily racialized terms, as "a troglodyte king over a race of cavemen," a "dull, emotionless, prosimian hulk of bone and sinew—a sort of human megatherium, who has come crashing up from the swamps with the slime of pre-Adamite wickedness," and a "primitive man with a simple mind." The question White posed was, how had Croker come to power despite his evident racial inferiority—"what has set this barbarian to rule over a free city?" His answer was evolution. Croker "had climbed the "natural stepping stones of a political system of a great city," a process White labeled "natural selection" and "survival of the fittest." This ascent resulted from Croker's adaptation. He developed a "sort of anthropoid honesty" and "acquired a veneer of manners." His fists even "whitened," the journalist reported. Now Croker was sitting "on the throne and dispos[ing] a sort of jungle justice, while civilization knocks its knees together in stupid, terrified adulation." While White's purpose was to undercut popular support for Croker, his emphasis on the natural reasons for his ascent to power confirmed the idea that bosses and their methods, however undesirable, were inevitable by-products of urbanization.[35]

Evolutionary arguments that justified the machine meshed well with those that drew on assumptions about the connection between gender and public life. Implicit in the contention that bosses and machines were the products of natural selection was the premise that politics was a form of conflict. Lewis's account of Croker's rise, Cox's emphasis on his own physical abilities, and the claims of other city politicians who prevailed in "actual physical conflict" went a long way toward explaining why they had also triumphed in politics. Darwinism thus fit comfortably with the depiction of politics as a fiercely masculine realm of group conflict. This claim was hardly new: it was a staple of the general rationale for party politics through much of the nineteenth century and a common basis for excluding women and dismissing reformers as effeminate and ineffectual.

As women's presence in public life increased, urban partisans asserted their manliness more vehemently. A profile of Philadelphia boss William Stokely prepared by his backers declared him "a man of extraordinary physical courage" who stood strong against threats. During the 1880s John Kelly's authorized biographer breathlessly described his subject's "granite firmness." Israel Durham proudly declared himself in favor of "honesty and manliness." Almost every profile of a city politician included reports of their physical exploits as young men and references to their size, bearing, or pugilistic abilities. Lewis's biography of Croker even told of how the Tammany boss had gone swimming with sharks while on vacation in Florida.[36]

When not recounting battles in the wild, profiles of city politicians told of clashes in the streets. Biographers of Kelly and Croker both wrote with admiration of their subjects' prowess as boxers, a sport closely linked to the urban underworld. The *Tammany Times*'s depictions of party leaders routinely presented them in similar terms, as "political fighters" who believed in "a fair fight and no favor and may the best party win." George Cox recalled that he "was as fond of a scrap as anyone and I dare say that I fought a good many times and if my memory serves me right I was the victor." Both Boston's Martin Lomasney and Richard Croker faced murder charges as young men; though neither was convicted, the claim added an extra veneer of toughness to their personas. Building on the theme, George Washington Plunkitt used a pugilistic metaphor to explain why reformers "go down and out in the first or second round, while a politician answers to the gong every time." One had "gone into the fight without trainin', while the other trains every time and knows every fine point of the game."[37]

The military terminology that infused partisan rhetoric bolstered masculine themes as well. Martial imagery had long been a major part of partisan culture and was especially prominent in Tammany's self-promotion during the 1890s. Croker's declaration that politics was war in his 1892 *North American Review* essay was but one example of this pervasive motif. In another piece in the same journal several years later he compared voting to shooting a gun. The *Tammany Times* regularly used military rhetoric in its descriptions of the organization and its leaders. "The new Eighth Assembly District is in fighting trim" and its members were "ready for the political battle of the coming fall," the paper reported after the 1895 redistricting. A report on a recent organizational meeting declared that the machine would be run by "three Major-Generals, thirty-five Brigadier-Generals and thirty-five colonels…[who] will be in constant communication with their Majors, Captains, and Lieutenants, and from these officers the solid body of Tammany voters can be reached." Croker even grudgingly praised the reform administration of Mayor William L. Strong because "in some respects" it had "a semi-military air about it and that ought to result in discipline."[38]

This emphasis on war and conflict had a dual significance. It helped politicians sustain blue-collar support even as they put on middle-class clothes, and it lent legitimacy to the idea that politics was a battle among groups. The machine presented the men who ran it not as working-class thugs but as solid, respectable leaders who retained the masculinity associated with urban street life. In part this was because fighting—whether boxing or gang battles—played a prominent role in Gilded Age working-class culture. But there was more to it. Workers and immigrants had long recognized that politics was conflict: decades of strikes and riots and the failure of labor republicanism made the notion of a consensual politics absurd from their point of view. Most were quite comfortable with a

vision of politics as a clash of interests. Aggressive, contentious behavior, in or out of politics, was a badge of honor and a demonstration of fitness to lead, not a dishonorable mark that rendered one unsuitable for public service.

Urban partisans used gender in other ways as well. A case in point was Tammany's response to the rise of the Women's Municipal League during the 1890s. Tammany answered in part by dismissing WML activists as busybody women, but the machine also made its own demure partisan women more visible. The *Tammany Times* established a "women's department" that focused on shopping and advertisements, "dress reform," fashion, charitable activities, and sentimental stories of male chivalry that reinforced female party loyalty. By 1897 there was a Women's Tammany Club, which promised to perform "the quiet work of women at home with those we meet and know and visit, with those who know us, like us, and believe in us, that tells and often turns the scale." Rejecting the more aggressive efforts of other public women, these attempts to define female partisans reinforced traditional limits on women's political activity.[39]

Women entered the rhetoric of urban partisans in another fashion as well. One of the stock characters in most biographies of big-city politicians was the saintly, widowed mother. William Stokely, George Cox, John Kelly, Tim Sullivan, and James Michael Curley were among the many urban bosses whose life stories noted the passing of their fathers at a young age and the struggles of their mothers to raise them in poverty. Kelly's biographer noted the strong influence his devout mother had on the politician, instilling in him a strong faith and upright character. When faced with a sharp attack from prominent New York City police inspector Thomas Byrnes in 1889, Sullivan responded with an autobiographical speech in which his impoverished mother's labors to keep his family afloat played a central part. Sullivan cited other womanly influences as well, such as the kindly schoolteacher who arranged for him to receive a free pair of shoes as a boy, a gesture he later repaid by providing shoes to poor children on an annual basis. When serving as mayor of Boston, Curley famously ordered long-handled mops for city hall scrubwomen, a kindness he attributed to memories of his mother's aching knees after spending a day scrubbing floors as a domestic worker.[40]

The emphasis on these feminine influences softened the edges of the heavily masculine, often violent images projected by politicians. John McLaughlin, the supportive biographer of John Kelly, filled his account of the Tammany leader's youth with stories of pitched battles against Know Nothings. But one of Kelly's first fights, in which he emerged victorious, occurred when another boy teased him about his devotion to his mother. Tim Sullivan established both his political and personal reputations as a young man when he beat up a bully who was attacking a woman. Such accounts, and even the mere presence of compassionate

women in the lives of these men, helped temper the portrayal of male ferocity that so often accompanied these politicians.[41]

These feminizing elements served another purpose as well. As Daniel Czitrom has noted, the emphasis on feminine influence was a core element of an emerging cosmopolitan political style that emphasized the provision of social services. Writing of "Big Tim" Sullivan, Czitrom noted how his subject "consistently celebrated the strong guiding hand of women in his own personal development," a celebration that "translated into a social feminism." Sullivan often cited these feminine antecedents when expressing his concern for his poor constituents, his support for social welfare legislation, and even his backing of woman suffrage. Curley's gesture to Boston scrubwomen in memory of his mother did much the same thing a few years later.[42]

Such steps allowed bosses to incorporate parts of the agenda of clubwomen and settlement workers while deflecting others. The mostly middle-class activist women who sought to "domesticate" politics during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries directly challenged the notion that politics was, or ought to be, a male realm characterized by conflict. They instead promoted a political concept rooted in cooperation and deliberation, especially across class and ethnic lines. In highlighting the influences of mothers, wives, and daughters on their actions, and in pursuing social reforms, city politicians blended masculine and feminine elements into a distinctive urban political ethos. But by casting themselves as defenders of hearth and home, a quintessentially male role, they also reinforced the conventional division between the peaceable, domestic realm and the violent, disputatious public sphere.

Femininely inspired kindness helped explain another aspect of the larger defense of urban machines. The image of the gruff, even corrupt, but nevertheless kindhearted boss has been perhaps the most enduring aspect of the effort to legitimize machine politics around the turn of the twentieth century. Although there is good reason to doubt the extent of the boss's generosity, at least in terms of providing direct and tangible benefits to all his neighbors, there is no mistaking the centrality of this claim to the broader attempt to defend machine politics.

The provision of informal assistance to the lower classes had long been a staple of urban party politics. The gestures of Fernando Wood and William McMullen during the antebellum period had developed into a more routinized process by the Gilded Age. Even E. L. Godkin recognized that Tweed was popular to a large degree because he acted as a "friend of the needy." Reformer William Ivins described more concretely the activities of a local politician in New York in 1884: "The duties of an Assembly District leader are manifold. If he wishes a strong following in his district he must be at the service day and night of his neighbors."

This help took many forms, from intercession with authorities for the young man arrested for "fast driving" to finding work for the unemployed. Not least, "if a poor devil is in want of a dollar, he must let him have it." Another report a decade later painted the same picture. A Tammany district captain was "the adviser, the confidant, the helper of the people in his district," a man who provides bail, ensures hospital care for the sick, arranges jobs, takes care of the impoverished widow, and "must attend every wedding and funeral."[43]

Local bosses increased their efforts to relieve distress during and after the depression of the early 1890s. When unemployment spiked, Chicago ward boss "Hinky Dink" Kenna began providing food and shelter for close to eight thousand destitute men and served daily lunch for jobless men, a practice he continued into the 1920s. "Big Tim" Sullivan inaugurated a tradition of serving a free Christmas dinner to thousands of poor people on the Lower East Side in 1894 and launched his shoe giveaway a few years later. When James Michael Curley came on the scene in the Roxbury section of Boston, he quickly made a name for himself by finding work for the unemployed and providing relief for the poor.[44]

These politicians argued that they delivered their assistance as a friend and neighbor, which explained the loyalty of their constituents. Unlike conventional charity, which aimed to reward only the well-behaved "worthy poor," the boss's help came with no conditions attached, save for the expectation of a vote at the next election. "I believe in liberality," Tim Sullivan insisted: "I am a thorough New Yorker and have no narrow prejudices. I never ask a hungry man about his past; not because he is good, but because he needs food." In an interview that highlighted his extensive generosity to his impoverished constituents, Martin Lomasney explained his power as the product of friendship. "I am right here with them all the time and that's what counts," he responded when asked about the source of his power. "When you live with people 365 days a year, they get to know you and trust you." When Jane Addams and her fellow Hull House settlement residents challenged local boss Johnny Powers during the 1890s, he explained his persistent success more succinctly: "I am what my people like, and neither Hull House nor all the reformers in town can turn them against me."[45]

Just as the clash between Addams and Powers produced a bristling debate about gender roles, it also generated an influential account of a local politician's generosity. The inability of Addams to persuade local voters to oppose a man she believed operated against their interests prompted her to consider more carefully why Powers won office consistently despite his evident corruption. The reason Powers ruled Ward 19, she concluded, in a pair of well-publicized 1898 essays, was that his constituents viewed him as a good man. From their perspective, his many kindnesses—jobs for those who needed them, money to a poor family for a funeral, bail for a wayward son, or turkeys at Christmas—demonstrated

that he had their best interests at heart. Addams was not citing these gestures as evidence that the local machine was a force for the good, but she proposed that her audiences learn a moral lesson from Powers instead of condemning him. His ability to obtain "a sense of identification" with the people was worth emulating. If reformers could do that, and thereby demonstrate a real concern for the fortunes of the poor, they stood a far better chance of persuading them to support civic reforms.[46]

Other settlement workers concurred. Writing a few years earlier, New York's Stanton Coit cited Tammany's willingness to provide for the poor to demonstrate that even the "'machine'" could, at least at times, "be made into an instrument of justice and mercy." Boston's Robert Woods, though less sympathetic to bosses and less sensitive to immigrant concerns, nonetheless echoed Addams's arguments about the generosity of ward leaders in the city's polyglot districts. "Partly from a love of position and partly from a good heart," the settlement worker reported, the local leader provided work, Christmas turkeys, and funeral expenses for the needy; distributed free tickets to dances, the theatre, and baseball games; and provided free railway passes to those who needed them. Across town, reformer Mary Parker Follett observed first hand the generosity of James Michael Curley and later recalled it as one of the key reasons why machine politics persisted even when self-evidently corrupt.[47]

Sympathetic journalists drew on these accounts to explain why bosses ruled. *Gunton's Magazine* reported that the secret to Tammany's power resided in its attitude toward the "common people, especially the great mass of the poor." Another article asserted that Tammany Hall did "more for the daily personal comfort, happiness, and well being of the average tenement dweller than all of the charitable and philanthropic organizations of New York.... In relieving distress, in providing for daily wants, in furthering ambitions, in helping men out of their troubles, and in assisting them to get on in the world, Tammany does a wonderful work." A 1903 newspaper profile of Roxbury's James Michael Curley explained the young politician's rapid ascent in his district as the result of the enormous number of places he had secured for his followers and his willingness to help his poor constituents. Curley, the article noted, called his political organization the Tammany Club in part because the name connoted generosity to the poor. While not every journalistic account of machine politics offered this argument, a considerable number gave credence to the bosses' claims of generosity.[48]

Plunkitt of Tammany Hall sounded the same theme. Though often taken as the unfiltered words of an adept politician, the book was as much the work of *New York Evening Post* reporter William Riordon as it was of Tammany district leader George Washington Plunkitt. Though it was written in Plunkitt's voice, Terrence McDonald has shown that Riordon had a heavy role in shaping the

"series of very plain talks" that constituted the book. It's likely that Riordon produced one of the book's most famous chapters—the account of the "strenuous life" of a district leader that closed the book—without Plunkitt. (It is the only chapter written in the third person, and in an editorial note Riordon claims that it is drawn from Plunkitt's diary and "my daily observation" of his work.) It begins at two in the morning, when Plunkitt is roused to provide bail for a constituent, and continues as he provides relief to victims of a tenement fire, secures employment for four local men, attends Italian and Hebrew funerals, presides over a political meeting, visits a church fair, and stops in at a wedding on the way home. Though reported as "the actual record" of a day in the boss's life, the chapter's catalog of service and generosity is more likely a pastiche of Plunkitt's activity that reflected what was by 1905 the prevailing understanding of how machine politicians operated.[49]

There is reason to doubt the claims that reformers and journalists made about the generosity and kindness of politicians. Even when they wanted to, ward leaders could not deliver on every promise of help. Bosses such as Plunkitt, Chicago's Johnny Powers, and in Boston, Martin Lomasney and James Michael Curley had limited supplies of patronage, which they reserved for their closest followers. Most recipients were Irish immigrants whose families had resided in these districts for a generation or more. Newer immigrants from southern and eastern Europe were slow to naturalize and begin voting. Politicians, stretched already by the demands of existing constituents, had little incentive to mobilize newcomers. Only when forced by electoral challenges from socialists, reformers, or the opposing party did these politicians do much for the newest and poorest in their midst. And recipients recognized that the help they did receive resulted from something other than friendship. Lomasney's neighbors remembered him as personally honest and a significant contributor to his district's economic welfare but also as "ruthless in manipulating his constituents for his own political ends."[50]

The help bosses provided—and claimed to provide—should be seen in the context of the era's class politics. The fear of radicalism and political upheaval provoked by the insurgencies of the 1880s reintensified during the depression of the 1890s and remained salient into the twentieth century. Bosses claimed that their provision of assistance and their intimate ties to the urban poor limited the appeal of socialists and other radicals. When a politician such as Cincinnati's George Cox argued that one of the distinguishing characteristics of a party boss was the ability to "control" men, it was not difficult to hear echoes of the "law and order" campaigns that had arisen in opposition to labor activism in Cincinnati during the 1880s. Urban machine politicians, however corrupt or undemocratic they appeared to reformers, sought to remind middle-class voters that they were necessary and useful bulwarks against social and economic upheaval.[51]

Big-city politicians tended to make these claims explicit when faced with sharp criticism. One of the chief arguments asserted by supporters of Philadelphia mayor William Stokely against the denunciations of local reformers during the early 1880s was his role in limiting "mob" violence and preventing the loss of property during the 1877 railroad strike. When the campaign against Tammany and its use of the city police for corrupt purposes became the focus of reform indignation in 1893, the *Tammany Times* was quick to praise the police for their role in quelling radicalism. In August it carried an excerpt from the *American*, a sympathetic city paper, praising the police for breaking up a "mob of socialistic and anarchistic Russian Jews." A "restless and un-American element" had been "incited to violence by rabid anarchists of the Emma Goldman stripe." The article also noted that it was the "biggest men, physically," among the police who checked the "undersized and puny rioters," a comment that reminded readers of the necessity of masculine force as a means of preventing revolution.[52]

The question of social order in cities revolved in large part around immigrants. By the 1890s nativists argued that European newcomers were bringing with them radical ideas that conflicted with the American faith in democracy and capitalism. Urban politicians and their apologists stressed that machine politics helped the immigrants assimilate and ensured their civic loyalty. Tammany was a "great digestive apparatus," Richard Croker told William Stead. "Think of the hundreds of thousands of foreigners dumped into our city," he argued. "Tammany looks after them for the sake of their vote." In doing so, it also "grafts them onto the Republic, makes citizens of them in short; and although you may not like our motives or our methods, what other agency is there by which so long a row could have been hoed so quickly or so well." Tammany apologist Alfred Lewis was even more direct. The machine, he wrote, "acts as coast guard of American institutions. [It] makes captive the ignorant, the anarchistic, and the unrepublican, as he lands. It ties him hand and foot and makes him harmless." Tammany and other such organizations served as a "suppressive influence, moving for public order and to the subjection of what might be a mob spirit…[which] become those small first gusts of violence which unchecked conflate as riots."[53]

Plunkitt of Tammany Hall made much the same point when it celebrated Tammany's "patriotism." In a passage attacking "the curse of civil service reform," Plunkitt argued that patronage and partisanship ensured civic loyalty. Equating party allegiance with patriotism, he complained that there were thousands of men who had worked for the Tammany ticket but could no longer get patronage jobs because of civil service restrictions, causing their faith in American institutions to wane. "I know more than one young man in past years who worked for the ticket and was just overflowin' with patriotism," Plunkitt reported, "but when he was knocked out by the civil service humbug he got to hate his country

and became an Anarchist." In an almost assuredly apocryphal story, he told of a young, evidently Irish voter in his district—"Flaherty"—who ended up fighting for Spain during the Spanish-American War because he flunked a civil service exam. This was "what is goin' to happen when civil service crushes out patriotism," Plunkitt claimed. "The republic will go to pieces. Then a czar or sultan will turn up…[and] there will be h——to pay." Embedded in the colorful language and humor was a clear warning: without machine politics keeping the urban poor in line, democratic and capitalist institutions were at risk.[54]

Ostensibly neutral observers made the same point. Daniel Greenleaf Thompson insisted that "the respectable public at large ought to be very grateful for the perfection of that despotic system by which the whole body is controlled by a few leaders." It was, he added, "far better in every way for the city that half-educated, wholly illiterate and newly naturalized voters should be held, if they can be, under the influence and sway of a strong, well-compacted, and centralized organization, that they be taught an allegiance to it, and learn to obey the behests of its commanders." Complaints about corruption and tyranny often overlooked this point: "Dictation and a firm hand in supporting it are not only necessary for the political society, but are of no mean value to the community at large." Journalist (and later political scientist) Henry Ford Jones made a similar point in *The Rise and Growth of American Politics* (1898). In heterogeneous cities, he argued, machines provided a nationalizing glue that ensured the loyalty of immigrant newcomers, fusing them "into one mass of citizenship, pervaded by a common order of ideas and sentiments, and actuated by the same class of motives."[55]

Indeed, almost every argument and assertion that urban politicians and their defenders employed in self-defense buttressed these claims. The emphasis on social mobility that political biographers so often featured in their profiles of city bosses helped politicians straddle the class divide, earning them sympathy and respect from middle-class leaders while allowing them to identify with workers as well. These sketches also suggested that the United States still had a relatively open society rather than the hardened class lines that labor radicals decried. The constant drumbeat of patriotism, whether in the form of Fourth of July parades and picnics or the dedication of an elaborate monument to the 42nd New York Infantry, Tammany's contribution to the North's Civil War effort, reinforced the organization's emphasis on patriotic loyalty. And of course the obsession with masculinity assured worried members of the middle class that bosses had the capacity and willingness to control the masses by force if necessary. Through these and other reminders, urban politicians sought to make themselves essential to middle-class voters fearful of social upheaval and distinguished themselves and their machines from the more radical labor organizations that competed for the allegiance of the lower classes.

For all the talk of politicians, journalists, and reformers about why bossism prevailed, it may have been through fiction that justifications of machine politics penetrated most deeply into the popular mind. Late nineteenth-century popular fiction typically portrayed politics, and especially city politics, in a negative light. Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner's *The Gilded Age,* John Hay's *The Breadwinner,* and David Ross Locke's *The Demagogue* all presented urban public life as a sinkhole of corruption. But in the 1890s a countertrend to this literature emerged that featured gruff but essentially benevolent bosses as stock elements, including in some of the best sellers of the era. Nearly every element of the self-justification bosses offered on their own behalf—the tough competitiveness of politics, the evolutionary necessity of bosses and machines, their masculinity, their femininely inspired generosity, and their capacity to control the masses—reappeared in one or more of the popular novels that touched on urban public life in this era. These stories supplemented the arguments of not only politicians but also independent observers who presented the machine in these terms. Mixing a heavy dose of sentiment with claims of realism, these stories likely reached a wider audience than scholarly tracts or even articles in middle-class magazines.[56]

Perhaps the most significant of these novels was Paul Leicester Ford's *The Honorable Peter Stirling and What People Thought of Him,* which appeared in 1894. This long-forgotten work was a modest sensation in its day. It sold more than 220,000 copies—in an era when 50,000 was considered a strong figure—and provided the basis for a stage production. Part of the reason for its success may have been the mistaken idea that its hero was a fictional version of Grover Cleveland. The sentimental nature of its plot, in which the underestimated hero not only rises to power but gets the girl, probably contributed to its success as well. But at its core the book was a defense of machines and bosses, with more than one didactic passage explaining the virtues of urban politicians and the shortcomings of municipal reformers. Its popularity suggests that at the very least the idea of the benevolent, respectable boss circulated widely in 1890s America.

The novel told the story of a poor boy who made good through politics but remained a man of the people. Stirling, whose name bespoke his character, grew up in a modest household, an only child raised by his widowed mother. Family ties enabled him to attend Harvard, but he was an unpopular, awkward, and effeminate figure who was outshined by his insincere classmate, the suggestively named "Watts D'Alloi."[57] When D'Alloi won the hand of Helen, the upper-class woman who had rejected Stirling, the distraught protagonist retreated to a shabby apartment in a poor section of New York City, where he studied law. After passing the bar and waiting a year, he won his first case, a suit against a company

that provided tainted milk to poor customers. That event led to an investigation of the city's milk supply, which gradually drew Stirling into politics. In that setting, his honesty and decency, as well as his willingness to listen to and learn from professional politicians, carried him upward. He also came to know his neighborhood and the people in it intimately, which helped him govern effectively and humanely. Ultimately, he became not only the boss in his district but the widely respected leader of the city organization.

Ford's novel had all the elements of the typical biographies of real-life bosses, not least the customary gender conventions of the day. His saintly mother provided Stirling with an example by which he constantly guided his behavior. Over the course of the story, Stirling went from an effeminate, flabby weakling to a strapping man, a transformation he achieved in part by vigorous exercises such as "swinging clubs"—the Gilded Age equivalent of weight lifting—in his rooms. He became a confident horsemen, rescuing Leonora, the beautiful young daughter of Watts and Helen, when she was trapped on a runaway horse. He also became an effective fighter whose pugilistic abilities served him well in the political arena—"a man who knows how to fight," as one local politico noted with admiration. By the end of the story he has won the love of Leonora, an indication that he had become a fully masculine figure. It was this manly vigor that Ford extolled and contrasted with the "super-refinement" of leading municipal reformers.[58]

Ford also presented politics as a worthy enterprise. When Stirling was appointed to an investigative committee following the tainted-milk case, he soon discovered that the politician on the committee was a more effective and practical worker than either the well-to-do landlord or the talkative labor agitator. Much of the story centers on the education of Stirling, who gradually learned not only the workings of politics but about sewage systems, the fire department, and the various occupations of the people in his district. Ultimately, he became an expert on governing a city, one to whom his upper-class friends turned with questions about city life and city politics. By the end of the book Stirling was defending machine politics in terms that Richard Croker and his peers would readily recognize. Bosses were "in politics for a living," Stirling explained at a dinner party hosted by D'Alloi; they had "made of it a life study." Reformers, by contrast, had other occupations and thus could not develop the necessary expertise.[59]

Stirling was a kindly friend to his working-class constituents. He got his start in politics because he was upset with how a political deal undercut the resolution of the tainted-milk lawsuit, and throughout the book he remained a sympathetic neighbor who frequented saloons even though he did not drink (at his mother's request) and who was ready with help when a poor constituent needed it. "The ward knows me," he explained at the same dinner party, "there's hardly a voter who doesn't. They've tested me. Most of them like me." In a litany that would

be echoed in many boss profiles, Stirling then recounted how he had socialized with them, talked with them, and "helped them in their troubles." He said "a kind word over their dead," was a godfather to many children, and had known many voters all their lives. "Do you suppose," he added, that "because speakers unknown to them say I am wrong, and because the three-cent papers, which they never see, abuse me, that they are going to turn from me unless I make them?"[60]

Like the bosses themselves, Ford offered an implicit justification for this style of politics as a means of maintaining social order. In one of the novel's culminating scenes Stirling led his local regiment, made up largely of working-class Irish men, into a pitched battle with militant anarchists and socialists who were threatening the city during a general strike. Stirling's regiment was tapped to lead the attack, an arrangement set up by his political rivals in the hope that his working-class constituents would rebel against him. But the boss held the loyalty of his men, and the radicals were defeated. Stirling was wounded in the battle—for a moment it appeared to a frantic Leonora that he had died—and emerged as a heroic figure. Not lost on contemporary readers was Ford's point that manly bosses such as Stirling, through their strong connections to working-class immigrants, could maintain the loyalty of blue-collar voters and ensure that more radical political ideas did not gain a foothold in the impoverished sections of American cities.[61]

Ford's Stirling served as a prototype for the fictional city bosses that followed. While it was still possible to encounter novels that presented urban politicians in wholly negative terms, the trend in American popular literature was to depict them sympathetically, even admiringly. Turn-of the-century novels by Francis Churchill Williams, Booth Tarkington, Brand Whitlock, Mark Lee Luther, and Alfred Henry Lewis all included political bosses as major characters, and in each case the politician was in at least some respects an admirable figure. At the same time, the intolerant, impractical, unattractive reformer became an increasingly common character in fiction that dealt with city politics. As the Ohio politician and novelist Brand Whitlock put it, "I came to know both species pretty well, and in the latter connotations of the term, I prefer the politician. He, at least, is human."[62]

In various ways these books signaled that the portrait of city politics they sketched was a realistic one. Most used vernacular dialogue and drew on the ethnic and class stereotypes that characterized the urban realism of the period. Whitlock's role as a politician as well as a writer gave credence to his fiction while Lewis's *The Boss,* which appeared closely on the heels of his biography of Croker, seemed to be a fictionalized version of Croker. Theodore Roosevelt praised Tarkington's *In the Arena,* which included several chapters set in urban locales, for its realism. In a foreword to *J. Devlin, Boss,* Francis Churchill Williams

reminded readers of his protagonist's kindness ("hurrying to the bedside of a stricken worker"), his masculinity ("his plain, strong body"), and his political skill (a "tireless brain [that] wove the political destinies of a city's thousands"). He then suggested that many of them knew a "'Jimmy' in his public character" and that they should remember the human side of him as well. Even Ford's heavily sentimentalized *Stirling* earned plaudits as a realistic take on city politics, in part because readers mistook the lead character for Grover Cleveland.[63]

Almost all the stories accepted the idea of professional politics, and some even embraced the argument that party leaders should be well compensated. The wholly sympathetic Jimmy Devlin became wealthy through politics, and Big John Kennedy of Lewis's *The Boss* declared that he was a private citizen pursuing his own self-interest, with no obligation to the public weal. "My pull is my capital," he insisted in a passage evidently designed to echo Croker. "I'm as much entitled to get action on it in favor of myself as a bank has to shave a note. That's why I take forty per cent."[64]

To some extent, fictional portrayals of urban bosses were reassuring on questions of class and social order as well. Stephanie Foote has suggested that boss novels, by downplaying ethnicity, made the prospect of a cross-ethnic political alliance based on class more threatening. They implied that "the Boss might be mobilizing and configuring the 'other half' beyond ethnic categories into solidarities based on other kinds of alliances." Numerous anti-machine novels made this point, but Foote overlooks the ways in which these pro-boss stories presented machine politics as a bulwark against radicalism and a protector of capitalism. The title character in Lewis's *The Boss* notes how he solidified his control over Tammany by defeating a labor-backed candidate reminiscent of Henry George. "Skilled to feel the sentiment, I could gauge both the direction and the volume of the new movement," the Boss reported. When he realized that "a majority of the people" backed the labor candidate, he concluded that "unless checked, or cheated, that labor uprising would succeed; Tammany and its old time enemies would alike go down." He goes on to tell how, in this first test of his leadership, he combined forces with the city's elite to nominate a respectable candidate and defeat the insurgency.[65]

Much like Ford, Lewis implied that it was in the context of these efforts that one must understand the generosity of the boss. In another passage from the novel the narrator/boss catalogued the various kindnesses performed by Big John Kennedy, such as caring for the sick, finding work for the idle and shelter for the poor, and feeding the hungry. But his point was not simply to celebrate Kennedy's beneficence. It was, he explained, "neither humanity nor any milk of kindness which put him to these labors of grace; it was his method of politics and meant to bind men to him." This was the bargain both fictional and actual

bosses offered: control of the lower classes in exchange for power, respect, and profits. Lewis went on to suggest that this was the natural order of urban public life and that the vigorous, practical men who ran a machine like Tammany were far better suited to manage a city than were effete, ineffectual, and equally self-interested reformers.[66]

Francis Churchill Williams reassured readers craving order in a different fashion. In the climax of *J. Devlin, Boss* the title character clinches the reader's faith in his good character by protecting investors during a bank panic. Devlin had shown a knack for making money as a young newsboy, and his rise in politics had also meant an increase in wealth. Politics was, as young Jimmy quickly learned, "a good business," and he was quite open about his interest in the profits that public life offered. In the process of gaining power, he had become a bank president as well as city boss. At the end of the book, after he had retired from politics, there was a run on his bank during a nationwide panic. In the final scene Devlin entered the boardroom, where a meeting of anxious investors was taking place. He quickly guaranteed that all their money would be returned, even though it would come from his own pocket. He was willing to do this, he explained, because he had given them his word that nobody would ever lose money from his bank. In closing the book with this scene, Williams suggested that bosses were in fact reliable and essentially honest men who not only served the community but displayed the principles of good faith on which capitalism rested.[67]

In both fiction and fact the argument that bossism was necessary rested on a vision of city life as a polyglot, conflict-ridden setting on the verge of a social cataclysm. Bosses promised to manage these tensions and keep the peace by balancing the interests of the many competing groups that constituted metropolitan society. Group interests were legitimate in this context as long as they did not challenge the basic tenets of capitalism and the nation's established political institutions. Playing on fears of urban disorder, party leaders and their apologists promoted the idea that politics was about managing differences and keeping order rather than ensuring fairness or encouraging deliberation to determine the common good. Even some critics of machine politics accepted this formulation, at least implicitly, when they confirmed key elements of the boss's self-justification.

To the degree that this understanding of urban public life gained a place in the American political imagination, faith in civic harmony and a prevailing moral consensus lost further ground. Pro-machine arguments faced sharp challenges during the Progressive Era and did not prevail entirely. But growing numbers of politicians, reformers, journalists, novelists, and ordinary citizens would conclude that civic order was the best to be hoped for, that social differences were

irreconcilable, that they had only to be managed in such a way as to avoid radical upheaval, and that professional politicians were best suited to that job. Some reformers would begin to develop a civic vision that accommodated urban heterogeneity without retreating to either stale formulations of monolithic consensus or an uncritical acceptance of machine-style pluralism. But their ideas would prove a difficult sell to a public that seemed to crave order more than it did deliberative democracy.

6

PROGRESSIVISM AND PLURALISM

During his short stay in Chicago in 1893 and 1894 the controversial British journalist and reformer William Stead managed to stir things up considerably. He came to the midwestern city in November 1893 because he thought it an ideal place to launch an American branch of his civic church—an idea for a religiously based popular movement for social and political reform. A few days after arriving, he arranged for a mass meeting at the Chicago Music Hall to elicit support for his plan. The gathering attracted plenty of attention, as much for who attended as for the topics discussed. Convinced that a successful campaign required the participation of all sorts, he invited a startling variety of people. "Preachers and saloon keepers, gamblers and theological professors, women of doubtful reputation and members of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Anarchists and persons noted for their conservative views sat side by side today on the platform at Central Music Hall," the *New York Times* reported. Among the featured speakers was socialist Thomas Morgan, who cautioned that if the assembled group failed to heed Stead's warnings "in the name of Christ and for justice," it might soon face a dynamite attack.[1]

Perhaps spurred by Morgan's threat, the meeting produced results. Its final act was the appointment of a five-member committee charged with creating a new reform organization. Instead of a hand-picked collection of local worthies, it was a cross-section of reform interests: representatives of labor, business, education, churches, and women's groups. Working with Stead, who remained in town long enough to complete his searing exposé, *If Christ Came to Chicago,* they launched the Civic Federation of Chicago, a wide-ranging organization dedicated to

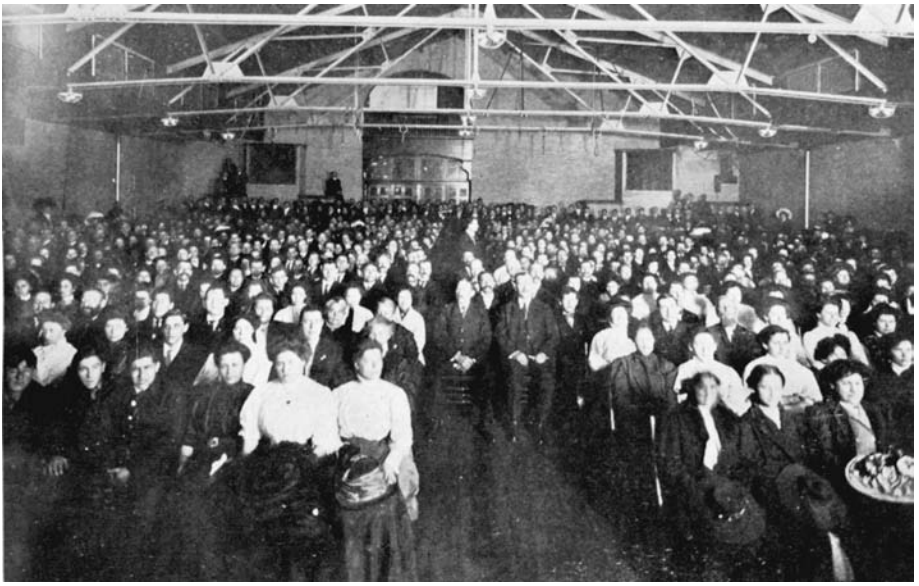


FIGURE 14. A gathering at a social center to discuss civic questions at a public school gymnasium in Rochester, New York. The social center movement was one facet of a broader attempt to develop an inclusive, deliberative democracy suited to urban life during the Progressive Era. *Rochester Social Centers and Civic Clubs: Story of the First Two Years* (Rochester, N.Y.: League of Civic Clubs, 1909), 17.

bringing together members of all classes and ethnic groups in a campaign to improve the city's social and political conditions.

What distinguished both Stead's meeting and the Civic Federation was their inclusiveness. Stead, who during his visit suggested that he was more likely to enter heaven alongside a saloon keeper than a society matron, insisted on soliciting the perspectives of the poor and the disreputable in civic enterprises. The Civic Federation and its political arm, the Municipal Voter's League, expressly sought to bring together citizens of both sexes and of all classes, religions, and races (as they termed ethnicities) in pursuit of a shared agenda. Instead of assuming that the best men could safely speak for the entire city, they sought to include the ideas and concerns of many groups, to foster dialogue among them, and when possible to reconcile differences among them.

The Civic Federation's approach exemplified an important tendency within Progressive Era urban political reform. Among the kaleidoscope of civic improvement campaigns that arose between the 1890s and World War I were significant attempts to reconfigure big-city public life in ways that better accommodated social heterogeneity. These endeavors did not form a coherent movement but

rather created a trend that cut across a range of undertakings. It was particularly evident in the concepts, institutions, and practices developed by a handful of individual reformers. Famed settlement worker Jane Addams, social center organizer Edward Ward, and theorist Mary Parker Follett imagined a democratic urban public life characterized by deliberation among people with different values, interests, and backgrounds. Their ideas and efforts are the subject of this chapter.

The pursuit of an inclusive, deliberative civics was not necessarily the dominant characteristic of Progressivism. The inchoate surge of reform activity running from the 1890s through World War I was too varied to label or describe easily. Many of the urban reforms of the period were attempts by an uneasy middle class to impose their values on an increasingly restless collection of immigrants and workers. In the realm of city politics, structural changes promoted by leading municipal reformers often worked in antidemocratic fashion, enhancing the power of highly educated experts and organized interests at the expense of local politicians and the workers and immigrants they represented. Most interpretations of Progressivism as a whole tend to stress the desire of the comfortable classes to discipline unruly masses and head off a revolt from below. But recently scholars have taken note of the democratic cast of a substantial chunk of the period's reform thought and practice.[2]

To highlight these attempts to forge a more democratic urban public life is not to insist on their perfection. Each was flawed, in both concept and practice. Addams, Ward, and Follett recognized the necessity of respecting differences. Yet at times they too assumed that social and political antagonisms were always reconcilable or failed to consider how to proceed when conflicts persisted despite extensive dialogue. Such limitations help explain why their models of democracy did not prevail, but they do not constitute grounds for their dismissal. These Progressives formulated serious, credible approaches to developing and sustaining an inclusive democratic civic life amid the diversity of the city. Their ideas have merit even in the context of more recent considerations of deliberative democracy, and we would do well to consider them carefully.

The democratic ideas of Addams, Follett, and Ward were part of a larger trend within Progressivism. Its intellectual roots lay in the development of Pragmatist philosophy. Charles Peirce, William James, and John Dewey devised an approach to knowledge that rejected the claim that there were fixed truths and instead stressed the role of experience as the essential means for understanding the world. Ideas that worked—that explained things and provided the basis for successful action—were true, they argued, at least until new circumstances or perceptions rendered them unworkable. When that happened, new or revised

concepts were required to match the new experiences. Pragmatism encouraged social experimentation that tested prevailing ideas and developed new ones to fit changing circumstances. It also fostered a willingness to consider the values and perspectives of workers, immigrants, and racial minorities, whose experiences had produced different understandings of how the world worked. These two characteristics—an enthusiasm for experimentation and an openness to the ideas of outsiders—distinguished democratic Progressives.[3]

The epistemology of Pragmatist philosophers found expression on the ground in the work of a range of reformers. In her study of Chicago Progressives, Laura Westhoff explores their application of what she calls "democratic social knowledge." Formulated in response to the anonymity and fragmentation of urban life and seeking to restore "the lost art of knowing others" in such a setting, democratic social knowledge resulted from the experience of, proximity to, and interaction with members of different social groups. Such encounters produced a sympathetic understanding of others. Westhoff identifies a range of organizations and activists that employed such an approach, including the Civic Federation (at least during the 1890s), Hull House, advocates of labor arbitration, and civil rights activists.[4]

Not surprisingly, women were at the center of this reform ferment. Hull House was staffed almost entirely by women, as were many of the settlements that constituted perhaps the most concrete expressions of a cross-class, cross-racial democratic ethic. Jane Addams, Hull House's most prominent resident, was among the chief advocates for the arbitration of labor disputes, a process she championed most notably in response to the Pullman strike in 1894. Celia Parker Woolley organized the Frederick Douglass House, a settlement in an African American neighborhood of Chicago that promoted interchange across racial boundaries as part of a larger pursuit of civil rights for blacks. Chicago clubwomen were also instrumental in developing venues for democratic dialogue during the first decade of the twentieth century. More broadly, women's prominence in all these efforts helped infuse the feminine qualities of sympathy and dialogue into the disputatious masculine public sphere.[5]

Enthusiasm for a more democratic civics was not limited to Chicago or to women. One indication of a wider tendency was the rise of a set of energetic, mold-breaking mayors who captured national attention. Toledo mayor Samuel Jones concluded that democracy had yet to be tried in the city. He, along with Detroit's Hazen Pingree, Cleveland's Tom Johnson, and a few other mayors, placed the concerns of workers and immigrants at the forefront of the reform agenda. Most important, they also sought ways to ensure that those constituencies had a voice and could partake in civic discussion. Pingree, who became mayor of Detroit in 1889, worked closely with organized labor and made a habit of visiting

saloons to exchange ideas with working-class voters. Jones, an industrialist who was elected mayor of Toledo in 1897, had established "Golden Rule Park" adjacent to his factory as a space for civic discussions during the 1890s.[6]

Among this new breed of leaders, Cleveland mayor Tom Johnson went furthest in establishing more democratic civic processes. He began holding open-air "tent meetings" while running for Congress during the 1890s, a practice he continued after becoming mayor in 1901. "Both sides, I should say all sides, will go to tent meetings—while as a rule only partisans go to halls," he recalled in his autobiography. Women generally avoided indoor political meetings but "showed no reluctance about coming to tent meetings." Even more important, in tents there was "a freedom from restraint that is seldom present in halls.... There is greater freedom in asking questions too, and this heckling is a most valuable form of political education." His aide, Newton Baker, noted the same phenomenon: "The women went with their baby coaches and pushed them up to the vacant space in front of the platform," he reported of a tent meeting, "and left the babies there while they sat back and asked Tom questions." Of course, Johnson excelled in the give-and-take of these meetings, usually to the detriment of the opposition that occasionally joined him on stage. But such assemblies operated on a different principle than the customary partisan rally. As Samuel Jones put it, they forced a politician to talk about issues instead of "what he did during the Civil War." They also facilitated an exchange of ideas instead of the promotion of a single agenda. Their "educational influence," Johnson concluded, was invaluable because it made voters "take an interest as nothing else would do."[7]

Pingree, Jones, and Johnson were politicians rather than theorizers. It fell to others to develop systematically the ideas and practices on which a more democratic politics might rest. Foremost among them was Jane Addams, who formulated a distinctly urban, explicitly pluralistic civic vision. She argued that it was in the "industrial quarter of a cosmopolitan city" where one could find the principles and behaviors necessary to realizing modern democracy.[8] Writing as a member of the middle class addressing her peers, she insisted that no group or class held a monopoly on virtue. She urged bourgeois Americans to respect and learn from the values and actions of workers and immigrants. Only by doing so could civic and social morals evolve from an outmoded individualism to an ethical code suitable for a diverse urban-industrial society. To be fully democratic required not just equal voting rights but equal regard for people with different cultural backgrounds and standards.

Addams matched this sophisticated political philosophy with canny public relations. By the time she wrote her acclaimed memoir, *Twenty Years at Hull House,* in 1909 she had become the foremost interpreter of big-city slum life in

the United States. In her role as the leading voice of Hull House, she had already published three books and numerous articles, given countless lectures across the country, and received extensive (and mostly positive) press coverage. Thousands, if not millions, of middle-class Americans came to know big-city tenement life through her carefully crafted writing and speeches.

In reading Addams, they also encountered a highly developed consideration of how democracy might operate in a metropolitan context. She contended that the urban masses employed a distinctive ethical code that should serve as the basis for a democratic public life in a modern society. She was not the first to acknowledge that the workers and immigrants crowded into tenement districts possessed different understandings of how public life should work, but she was among the first and easily the most prominent to treat these perspectives as legitimate. Unlike party politicians, she did not approach workers and immigrants simply as interests to be accommodated. Rather, she presented them as purveyors of ideals that might contribute to the formulation of a new civic culture and a richer conception of the common good. Addams thus demanded of the comfortable classes an openness to the experiences, perspectives, and values of their impoverished counterparts. Although she never fully institutionalized this ideal—not even Hull House met the standard consistently—its articulation represented the first extensive effort to define an urban political ethos that accounted for diversity without abandoning the hope of civic unity.

Presenting Addams as a sincere pluralist departs from some, but not all, accounts of her work and of the settlement movement as a whole. Activists established more than four hundred settlements in the immigrant quarters of American cities between 1886 and 1910. The idea was to create institutions that permitted middle-class reformers to live and work side by side with locals, establishing an intimate, equitable connection in the process. Numerous historians have documented the ways in which such efforts fell short of this standard. Even Hull House residents, Addams included, exhibited their fair share of condescension and insensitivity, a point Addams herself readily admitted. But it is important not to equate Addams with the settlement movement or even with Hull House. As several scholars have noted more recently, she distinguished herself by formulating an important, credible attempt to reconcile democracy and diversity in urban America.[9]

Addams's civic ethos took shape over her first two decades as a settlement worker. She launched Hull House with Ellen Gates Starr in 1889 and would live there for the rest of her life. In its initial conception the settlement aimed to bring the best of upper-middle-class experiences to the poor. But during the 1890s Addams gradually abandoned that model for one stressing cross-class and cross-cultural encounters. This evolution became an increasingly central (and perhaps

exaggerated) element of her self-presentation by the time she wrote her memoir, *Twenty Years at Hull House.* She used it as an example of how other members of bourgeois America might develop a greater sensitivity and appreciation for the ideas and values of workers and the immigrant poor.

Though regularly involved in the settlement's activities, Addams spent an increasing portion of her time promoting her ideas. In 1892 she delivered a pair of lectures on the "subjective necessity" and "objective value" of settlement work. These talks, and the published work that followed from them, established Addams as the leading voice for this new reform strategy. She was drawn into the 1894 Pullman strike as an arbitrator, gaining national attention in the process. Hull House's attempts to unseat local ward boss Johnny Powers later in the 1890s, and her subsequent commentary on that experience, helped establish her as a major interpreter of urban public life at the end of the nineteenth century. By the time she published her first book, *Democracy and Social Ethics,* to warm acclaim in 1902, she was a national figure of the first rank, and would remain so through the Progressive Era. After 1910 her attention shifted to national politics and to peace activism as World War I approached. But during the first two decades of her life at Hull House she engaged in a sustained attempt to interpret urban society for middle-class America and to redefine democracy to fit that social context.

Addams challenged middle-class Americans to "interpret sympathetically the motives and ideals of those who have acquired rules of conduct in experience widely different from our own." Her writings are littered with references to competing moral codes and distinctive understandings of truth. She wrote frequently of the clash between the "two standards of morals" that separated a traditional charity worker from the recipients of her aid. Benevolence alone was an insufficient motivation for social provision, which required a sincere and rigorous attempt to see things from the point of view of the poor. On matters of clothing, age of marriage, and even child labor, the experiences and values of the poor diverged from those deemed appropriate by the charity visitor, Addams noted, and "she gets herself in untold trouble" when judged by their ethics. The same premise applied to every aspect of civic life in a modern, heterogeneous, urban society.[10]

These arguments reflect the role of Pragmatism in Addams's thought. She was deeply influenced by her friend John Dewey's ideas about the role of experience in defining truth and informing ethical judgment (and she in turn influenced him). There was no a priori truth or goodness; only those beliefs tested and proved useful by experience could be taken as valid. Addams illustrated how this perspective shaped social interactions with a telling passage from *Democracy and Social Ethics.* She imagined a scene on a streetcar where three types—a middle-class man, a "philanthropic lady," and a trade unionist—appraised a newsboy.

The first silently applauded his work ethic, the second thought he should be in school, and the third worried about child labor. All three perceived his circumstances through the lens of their own perspective and experiences. All three views, in Addams's estimation, were legitimate. Only by recognizing, learning from, and integrating these varied ethical perspectives can we begin to grapple with the problems faced by poor boys in the city, she insisted.[11]

Addams did more than simply apply Deweyan ideas to the city. She blended Pragmatism with empiricism and Victorian concepts of gender, including a romantic emphasis on intuition and the ideal of domesticity, to produce a unique approach to urban reform. At its core it insisted that reformers identify with those they wished to help. The capacity for sympathy that women possessed, Addams contended, made them especially capable of developing not only an understanding of the urban poor rooted in social science but also the compassion necessary to devise effective reforms. Pragmatism offered theoretical reinforcement for her ideas, but the approach she developed flowed from her own thinking and experiences.[12]

The Pullman strike of 1894 sharpened her views in this regard. That event, one of the major labor clashes of the late nineteenth century, shut down rail traffic in much of the country, sparked popular outrage, and prompted federal intervention. Addams was drawn into the matter when the Civic Federation of Chicago asked her to act as a mediator during the dispute, and she met with both sides. While workers were open to arbitration, George Pullman refused to cooperate. Pullman had provided far more than wages for his employees. He had constructed a model town for them to reside in that included not only housing but a library, arcade, marketplace, and school. When his workers rebelled against a wage cut caused by the 1893 depression, Pullman believed them ungrateful and wholly in the wrong. For their part, workers chafed at the railroad baron's paternalism, which included strict rules governing individual behavior in his company town.[13]

In her commentary on the matter Addams presented Pullman as a tragic figure because he could not interpret his workers' motives sympathetically. In a series of lectures immediately after the strike she argued that Pullman was "a modern Lear," a man whose outmoded paternalism and individualism prevented him from understanding the motives of his workers in the same way that Shakespeare's Lear could not fathom Cordelia's behavior. This claim proved too controversial for publication at the time and would not appear in print until 1912. Addams nevertheless made her views known through public lectures and in a more tempered account in the chapter of *Democracy and Social Ethics* devoted to labor. Pullman's principal failure was that "he had lost the faculty by which he might perceive himself in the wrong." In fact, Addams argued, he had taken just

one of the possible perspectives on the matter—the "commercial standpoint"—but he could not see it from the "social standpoint." His apparent kindness was inadequate because of his inability to see things in terms other than his own. He could not even imagine that his workers had a legitimate point of view to express. Such an approach was undemocratic, Addams insisted, because it enforced a hierarchy in which his own ideas mattered while those of others did not.[14]

Addams herself insisted that it was necessary to view Pullman's workers sympathetically to understand the conflict fully. Pullman's error, and by extension the error of those millions who took his side during the strike, was to overlook the unselfish impulse that drove workers. Their willingness to sacrifice their own well-being to ensure that of their fellow workers constituted an ethical position that was superior to Pullman's individualism. Moreover, they had displayed respect for his moral code—they were "self-controlled and destroyed no property," she noted—yet he refused to respect or recognize theirs. Addams went further, arguing that in fact the labor ethic of cooperation and mutual support promoted social progress more effectively than the individualism leavened with paternalism favored by Pullman. Only by approaching workers as moral equals could middle-class Americans begin to devise democratic practices suited to modern life.[15]

The import of Addams's civic vision became clearer in her ruminations on Hull House's clash with local ward boss Johnny Powers. In her explanation for "why the ward boss ruled," she argued that Ward 19 voters backed Powers not because they were morally corrupt or ignorant but because they judged by a separate and fully legitimate moral standard. Conscious of their own tenuous economic position, these "primitive people" valued kindness and generosity over an abstract ethical consideration such as the municipal economy. Powers provided food, jobs, and bail when needed, attended funerals, bestowed handsome wedding gifts, and bought railroad passes for those needing to travel. His motives were less important than his actions, which earned him the admiration of most local voters. Reformers failed because they did not recognize the different standard at work in an immigrant community. "What headway can the notion of civic purity, of honesty of administration make," Addams asked, "against this big manifestation of human friendliness, this stalking survival of village kindness?"[16]

At first glance the evolutionary cast of such language suggests that she did not consider the peasant values she identifies to be legitimate. References to "primitive people" and a "stalking survival" seem to imply an inherent inferiority. But for Addams, these were technical terms. The people she profiled had been born and raised in a preindustrial society. They carried the "simple" values of these societies into the more complex industrial context of South Chicago (and urban America more generally). Addams did not contend that such ideals were inferior;

in fact, she counseled that they needed to be applied more widely. In her analysis of bossism, and more emphatically in later work, she argued that reformers had to do more than recognize and respect the different values that animated civic life in the slums; they had to incorporate them into their own thinking. It was the immigrant's emphasis on kindness and the sense of social solidarity it implied that was needed to make urban-industrial society work. Addams was not defending Powers—indeed, she condemned him forcefully—but she wanted reformers to "obtain a like sense of identification" with the poor by concerning themselves with social welfare first and political probity second.[17]

Addams's interpretation of ward politics gained at least some traction. Always a skillful promoter of her own ideas, she undertook an extensive speaking tour in conjunction with the publication of her essay. It appeared in two forms, a short piece for popular consumption in *Outlook* titled "Why the Ward Boss Rules" and a longer version for the *International Journal of Social Ethics.* She used the same material for her 1899 lectures, which would form the basis of *Democracy and Social Ethics.* Press coverage of her talks was substantial and for the most part favorable. A headline in the *Chicago Times-Herald* neatly summarized her argument, noting that Powers held power because he was "good to the poor" and that the "standard of ethics among his people must be considered" if reformers hoped to make headway. The *New York Evening Post* commented that immigrants supported the boss not because of a "pure love of evil" but out of "the same instinctive and undeveloped code of morality which they follow in all their life." Their desire "to be represented by 'a good man' is not a whit less strenuous than that of the best native stock. Only their idea of the good man is somewhat different."[18]

Not everyone grasped the subtleties of Addams's analysis. Ignoring her point about the validity of the ethical code Powers exploited, the *Cincinnati Journal and Messenger* presented him as just another Tweed. His method was simple: "to make presents to large numbers of foreign poor and to profess the heartiest sympathy in their welfare." While common in politics, such tactics were "really dangerous only in the presence of a large foreign population." Warning that immigrants now "herd together," the paper asserted that they would not assimilate and represented "one of the greatest dangers that ever beset any nation." Even the sympathetic journalist Ray Stannard Baker could not avoid lapsing into a dehumanizing Darwinism. The Italians, Poles, Jews, and poor Irish of Ward 19, he wrote, "are capable of being herded and driven by any one who is strong enough to wield the rod." Misreading Addams's evolutionary analysis, he described them as "ignorant foreigners, with centuries of tradition behind them that makes it impossible for them to understand that they are the masters and not the servants of public officers."[19]

One soon heard echoes of Addams's evolutionary take on ward politics in another settlement-sponsored study, but it too lacked her sympathetic understanding of immigrant voters. In 1902 Robert Woods and his colleagues at Boston's South End House published *Americans in Process,* an investigation into life in two of that city's ethnic enclaves, the North and West Ends. The book devoted a chapter to local politics, luridly titled "Traffic in Citizenship," which documented the activities of local bosses Martin Lomasney and John Fitzgerald and their organizations. It shared with Addams a sense that ethnic voters, lacking "the faculty of abstraction," judged politicians according to a different moral metric. But while Addams thought this standard worth emulating, Woods and his colleagues did not. "The present day barbaric outlook must be altered if we would impart truly civilized conceptions of politics or of life in general," they argued. Where Addams saw a valuable heritage that ought to inform contemporary civic life, her Boston counterparts saw an unmitigated evil in need of eradication.[20]

Addams continued her battle to overcome such interpretations. She expanded on the themes and arguments developed in her accounts of the Pullman strike and bossism in two books and numerous speeches and essays during the new century's first decade. Both *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902) and *New Ideals of Peace* (1907) pointed to the urban slum as a font of ethical precepts essential to the progress of modern society. Only when middle-class Americans recognized this point and approached immigrants with respect and an open mind would Americans develop the civic and social practices necessary to democracy. "As our land is growing cosmopolitan in its peoples," she declared, "let us meet it with a cosmopolitan culture, let us meet it with a cosmopolitan fellowship."[21]

For Addams, urban society itself provided the model for American democracy in the twentieth century. The small-town ideal, with its inherent homogeneity, had served an agrarian nation well enough. But the city, and more specifically the heterogeneous mix of peoples and cultures it encompassed, encouraged the behavior and attitudes Addams sought. "Mixing on the thronged and common road"—a decidedly urban image—was an essential characteristic of a democratic civic life. Her home city, Chicago, was "preeminently a city of mixed nationalities." The challenge its residents faced was "to learn to live together in forbearance and understanding and to fuse all the nations of men into the newest and highest type of citizen." Doing so, she added, would "constitute our finest contribution to the problems of American life."[22]

Urban social life also supplied the principles needed for a more responsive state. The constant concern for kindness evident in the lives of the poor and their sense of kinship with others struggling to survive in harsh circumstances constituted an ethic superior to individualism. Addams had highlighted these values in explaining the success of the ward boss. By the early twentieth century she

pointed to immigrants as the authors of a social ethic that addressed problems of inequality and difference. It was in "the poorer quarters of the cosmopolitan city" that one found an emphasis on compassion and help for fellow members of "the tribe" as well as the cooperation across tribal lines necessary for mutual survival. Impoverished immigrants thrust together in American cities had worked out a way of living that included both kindness and collaboration, Addams declared, a means of forging unity without sacrificing difference. This "creed" held "newer and larger possibilities for governmental development" and the basis for a better civic life.[23]

Concern for kindness and collaboration meshed neatly with another key dimension of Addams's thought. From the start of her public career, she stressed the importance of the role women could and should play in social development. By the early twentieth century she publicly supported woman suffrage as a means to expand the social welfare functions of government and improve social relations across class and ethnic lines. She made these points explicit in her chapter on "the utilization of women in city government" in *Newer Ideals of Peace*. Elsewhere in that book, and in many of her other writings, she challenged the militaristic ethic that characterized male-dominated party politics. Like women, poor immigrants possessed greater reservoirs of emotional pity and kindness, traits that provided a better basis for politics and government than manly ideals of individualism and conflict. In celebrating these qualities among the urban poor, Addams promoted the feminine traits of sympathy and dialogue over and against celebrations of vigor and action that characterized the masculine rationale for machine politics.

For all its internal coherence, Addams's civic formulation had its limits. Most obvious was her application of evolutionary logic. Her claim that South Italians and other peasant immigrants were "primitive people" was a technical point and not an indication that their ethics were less valuable. It may also have been a concession to prevailing ideas about immigrants which was necessary to get a full hearing from her middle-class readers. Nevertheless, such language made it too easy for others to dismiss these immigrants as inferior. Too often she rendered the urban poor as childlike or simple or denied that they possessed the ability to think abstractly. Such judgments were not simply incorrect; they invited the condescension that Addams rejected.

Addams's record on translating her ideas about democratic interchange into public policy was also mixed. Part of the purpose of Hull House (and other settlements) was to create a space where civic conversations could take place and where organizing efforts might also develop that would express neighborhood interests. Acutely aware of the gulf separating settlement residents from those they wished to aid, Addams and her Hull House colleagues sought to

establish venues where poor people were empowered. (Addams once noted her own preference for spinning classes because they permitted immigrant women to assume the role of teacher.) Innumerable exchanges between the comfortable and the poor took place in settlements—including what Addams described as a "decade of economic discussion at Hull House"—that would not otherwise have occurred. But paternalism marred other endeavors, and few settlements became places where locals were entirely comfortable. Where settlement workers were not as perceptive and sensitive as Addams, or where social control was fundamental to their agenda, the alienation was even sharper.[24]

More specifically, neither Addams nor other settlement workers engaged in sustained efforts to develop new political institutions or practices. After its campaign against Johnny Powers during the 1890s, Hull House withdrew from electoral politics, a course that almost all settlements took after 1900. From that point on, Addams and most of her peers concentrated on lobbying efforts, more and more of which focused on state and federal governments. Such tactics more often involved speaking for the poor than working with them (and learning from them). By eschewing the give-and-take of politics for the more streamlined process of advocacy, settlements elided the problem of translating civic discussion into political action and, ultimately, into public policy.[25]

Yet assessing Addams purely in institutional terms does her (and us) a disservice. In almost all her writing and speaking about urban life, she addressed members of the middle class, challenging them to reach beyond their comfortable, separate existences to encounter the poor and to learn from them. Her own life was a model in this regard (one reason why so much of her writing was autobiographical and why two of her favorite words were "we" and "our"). Her intent was to bring others along the intellectual path she had blazed. If she did not inspire a massive movement along those lines or construct formal mechanisms to turn neighborhood demands into legislation, she nevertheless designed a sophisticated model of citizenship that transcended social differences. To note that the settlement movement, Hull House, and even Addams herself fell short of this goal and thus to suggest that her pluralism was "a matter of expediency and mere rhetoric," as one historian has put it, is to judge her unfairly.[26]

If Jane Addams did not devote herself to developing democratic political institutions, her ideas influenced others who did. The Progressive Era featured a sustained effort to create what Kevin Mattson has called a "democratic public."[27] The most significant element of this endeavor was the launching of social centers in urban neighborhoods. The goal of these bodies was to create spaces and practices that encouraged civic participation, rational deliberation, and dialogue across social differences. They began with the proposition that modern society

was pluralistic—that there was not a monolithic public interest—and that the common good could be discovered and pursued only through a deliberative process. There were problems with such an approach, both in theory and in practice, but social centers nevertheless represented a substantial attempt to forge a more democratic civic life and are worthy of careful consideration.

Social centers were in some respects outgrowths of efforts by clubwomen and settlements to use public schools as civic venues. Mary Parker Follett, who spearheaded Boston's version of social centers on behalf of the Women's Municipal League, developed the idea as a settlement worker in the Roxbury neighborhood. Residents of New York City's University Settlement began by using the local public school for a boys' club and recreation and soon extended it to civic discussions. Other settlements soon followed suit, both in New York and elsewhere. Soon thereafter, reformers began to explore the possibility that school-based social centers might replace social settlements as a means of uniting urban neighborhoods for civic and social improvement. John Dewey, in a 1902 speech to the National Council of Education, insisted that having the school "operate as a center of life for all ages and classes" was an essential tool for the development of democracy. The campaign to use schools as social centers soon developed into its own movement, independent of settlement work.[28]

While the social centers that spun off from the settlement movement initially concentrated on recreation and educational programs, other efforts focused more on creating a genuinely democratic public opinion. Progressive Era civic reform campaigns often started with the assumption that "the people" was a singular entity with shared values and beliefs, an assumption that allowed them to avoid consulting ordinary citizens. But a few activists built institutions predicated on the idea that democracy began with grassroots discussions. Charles Zeublin, a Hull House resident who went on to launch two other settlements, devoted much of his career to promoting public education through lectures sponsored by the University of Chicago's extension division. Zeublin's idea was that the university would provide expert speakers who would engage the public in a continuing process of education and debate. Cleveland mayor Tom Johnson's tent meetings represented another antecedent to the social center movement, as did the work of his protégé, Frederic Howe. Not only did Howe argue forcefully, in *The City: The Hope of Democracy,* for a decentralized urban political order that fostered civic debate, but he went on to head the People's Institute in New York, a forum for public discussion. In Boston, George Coleman launched the Ford Hall Forum in 1908, a venue for public lectures and debates designed to create a more informed electorate. These and other reform endeavors started from the assumption that public opinion did not come in prepackaged, monolithic form. They recognized the heterogeneity of city life

and sought ways for people of different backgrounds and opinions to reason together for the common good.[29]

Social centers constituted the most extensive and organized efforts in this regard. They began with the work of Edward Ward, a former Presbyterian minister who signed on as the director of playgrounds for the Rochester, New York, schools in 1907. After consulting with Addams and other reformers, he created social centers, institutions that used schools during off-hours as settings for recreation and civic discussion. The idea caught on quickly, spreading from one district to the whole city within two years and earning Rochester national attention. After three years Ward moved to the University of Wisconsin, where he headed efforts to establish social centers in that state. In 1912 he convened a national conference, graced by soon-to-be president Woodrow Wilson, who endorsed the social center idea. Out of that meeting emerged a national organization and other leaders, including Mary Parker Follett, who would produce the most extensive rationale for the social center movement.[30]

Follett, Ward, and other advocates of social centers developed a cogent vision of how democracy might operate in an urban context. They conceived of neighborhood-based institutions housed in public schools which promoted deliberation on important civic issues. All perspectives were welcomed in such conversations. The idea was to forge a consensus that reflected serious consideration of all points of view. The intent was not to pit views and opinions against each other in a debate in which one side emerged victorious but to engage in what Follett called "integration." By that she meant the interweaving of differing ideas and opinions into a unified whole that expressed the desires of an entire community. Networks of these local groups would transmit this consensus upward to political representatives who would seek legislation and policies that conformed to this democratically conceived public opinion.[31]

Historians have too readily lumped these efforts to generate participatory democracy in with other Progressive Era campaigns to enforce a monolithic consensus that supported the status quo. In his history of community organizing, Robert Fisher rates social centers as a step better than settlements because they allowed local residents to ask for what they wanted instead of just supplying unsought help. But they still fell short of a democratic standard because of the biases of their professional organizers and the fears of radicalism that limited the scope of debate within them. As a result, he concludes, "citizen participation remained largely advisory and token." Another historian of the movement mistakenly dismisses social centers as attempts to divert class conflict by restoring rural concepts of community. Social center advocates were sometimes too quick to assume that unity would emerge from social intercourse, and they had no plan to address situations where consensus proved elusive, two conceptual flaws that

helped undermine their efforts. But they did recognize and address the problems of sustaining democracy in the impersonal, heterogeneous city.[32]

The essence of Edward Ward's approach was to create a sense of community across the class, ethnic, and partisan divisions that characterized urban society. His Rochester program was to be "absolutely democratic," which meant that it would create "in the midst of our complex city life" a place where "people of all races, classes and parties shall find a common gathering place, a common means of acquaintance, an opportunity to learn to think in terms of the city as a whole." Social centers would pull people out of the "various corners of our fragmentary life" and "broaden their outlook." Exposure to people of diverse backgrounds and opinions would create a greater sense of sympathy and respect for differences. From that sensibility would emerge a sense of common purpose. Unlike reformers who blithely assumed the existence of a single "people," all of whom shared basic values and assumptions, the Rochester movement started with the recognition that the people were divided by cultural inheritance, social experience, and political opinions. Only through regular dialogue and a reciprocal sense of respect could they begin to forge a legitimate consensus that might provide the basis for governance.[33]

A song written on the second anniversary of the founding of the city's first center captured this pluralistic (and gendered) mindset. Titled "The Social Center" and sung to the tune of the popular air "Mr. Dooley," the song celebrated "the place where everybody feels at home: / Forgets the external / And gets fraternal." Verses made clear the breadth of that sense of brotherhood. The first depicted social centers as places where Republicans, Democrats, and Socialists (or at least male members of these parties) could gather to discuss politics. Others cited the city's "many churches," its numerous races (by which it meant European national groups but also included "Hindoo" and "Chinee"), and many social cliques. A verse devoted to class noted "distinctions that are seen upon a street" and the fact that "some folks ride in auto cars and some folks on their feet / And worry about the price of clothes." Social centers, though, provided a place "where hats are off and rich and poor are one."[34]

Social intercourse alone would not forge such unity. That required deliberation, during which participants from all sides would engage with each other's ideas. Each social center in Rochester housed a civic club specifically devoted to discussion of political issues, and the fostering of such conversations became the central aspect of the movement. An anniversary publication celebrating the first two years of Rochester's social centers made this point clear by including numerous examples of debates among those of opposing viewpoints in which each side learned from the other. In one such case a civic club listened to arguments for and against saloons from advocates of each position. The result of

"such fair presentation" and the conversation that followed left the chairman of the county's Prohibition Party with "more respect than he had ever had before for the men who differed with him." Discussions of the labor question yielded a similar "broadening result."[35]

Ward offered a cogent if simplistic illustration of this process a few years later. He imagined a gathering of 170 people divided over the color of a two-sided shield. Using the "party method" to settle the question resulted in a sharp division between those who thought the shield was brown and those who saw it as green. Advocates of green gathered and listened to speeches in favor of that color, made that principle their platform, and developed such enthusiasm for their position that they perceived the advocates of brown to be "stupid or worse." Proponents of brown did the same thing. In the ensuing vote, green triumphed over its brown "enemy." Ward proposed a different course for resolving the question. If the two sides had gotten together to discuss the matter with open minds, they would have learned that in fact one side of the shield was brown, the other green. Such an approach recognized that the question was more complex than first supposed and that through an exchange "we would all have learned something" without generating the "poisonous idea that some of us were dishonest or imbecile."[36]

Ward's methods posited an alternative understanding of citizenship. In the place of partisanship and contestation, attributes celebrated by party leaders, he sought "a spirit of inquiry, the common desire to get to the truth." Perhaps defensive from his experiences in Rochester, where social centers were eventually undercut in part by charges of supporting radicalism, Ward insisted that the "nexus" of his program had "no common belief." Politics properly understood, he argued, involved discussion rather than battle, and its fundamental spirit should be "the American attitude which says 'come let us reason together.' "[37]

That commitment to reason also meant that status carried no weight in democratic deliberation. It was not the social position or education of a person engaging in discussion but the quality of his or her argument. When one social center took up the issue of commission government, the presenters included a "Polish washwoman," the president of the local branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, a day laborer, and a college professor. No record remains of the content of the discussion. But it was clear that the conversation was to proceed under the assumption that the merits of an argument mattered while the status of the person offering it did not. The washerwoman's perspective deserved the same hearing as that of the university-trained expert, both of whom could learn from her experiences and ideas.[38]

Exactly how these democratically developed sentiments would translate into public policy remained unclear. Ward addressed this element of his vision only

sketchily. He argued that greater civic discussion would create a more informed and alert electorate, forcing politicians to be more responsive to their constituents. Elsewhere he implied that social centers might operate with some form of direct democracy. In Rochester, social center participants formed local civic clubs, which organized themselves into a citywide federation that permitted further deliberation among representatives of each neighborhood and the expression of the collective views of the city's residents. Ward later proposed the creation of what he called Voters' Leagues, local bodies similar to Rochester's civic clubs. They too would be federated so that a question taken up in one locality might be brought to the attention of other neighborhood groups. Once an issue had been considered in every district of a city, citizens would vote on the matter, presumably in the form of an initiative or referendum.

Ward argued that Voters' Leagues would be something more than another of the interest groups that proliferated during the Progressive Era. These "all-inclusive" bodies would not be reform groups, devoted to specific concerns or remedies. The usual method, in which a small set of activists formed an organization devoted to a certain measure or issue that they believed required action (and that they claimed would serve the public good), put the cart before the horse in Ward's estimation. Instead, it was necessary to bring citizens together to discuss civic matters in order to determine what course should be taken. Only then should reforms be pursued, with the certain knowledge that they were undertaken on behalf of the whole community.[39]

It is also important to note that the social center vision was not an effort to return to a preindustrial order, as some scholars have contended. Despite references to town meetings or rural life revolving around "the little red schoolhouse," architects of these institutions designed them expressly for an urban context. Their basis in "neighborhoods" was one reflection of that perspective, as was their recognition of social diversity and their emphasis on the inclusion of people of different classes, ethnicities, religions, and political affiliations in civic deliberations. In Rochester, Ward chose an especially diverse district for a test run of the social center. It included both rich and poor, "many of the early residents of Rochester" as well as "many newly arrived citizens from foreign shores; many races, most of the religious, political, and social groups in the city are here represented." The intent was not to erase these differences but to reduce the salience of social divisions by exposing members of various groups to one another in the hope that common ground would develop. When Ward produced *The Social Center* in 1914, just one of its twenty chapters addressed the role of these institutions in "the rural community."[40]

The principal purpose of these neighborhood groups—to replace machine politics—also reflected their urban intent. They would supersede the usual

settings for conducting party politics, the saloon and the smoke-filled backroom. For Ward, the main idea was "the self organization of the voting body into a deliberative body to supplant party divisions." After citing Tammany as the classic example of an illegitimate partisan organization, he went on to insist that once established, social centers would permit the "emancipation from the enslaving, separating, false loyalties to parties, and for the realizing of ourselves as one political whole." Mary Parker Follett was, if anything, even more blunt, arguing that "an effective neighborhood organization will be a death blow to party" and would produce "genuine leaders instead of bosses."[41]

Follett, more than Ward, developed a systematic philosophical foundation for social centers. Born into a Quaker family in Massachusetts, Follett studied political science at Radcliffe, during which time she published *The Speaker of the House of Representatives,* a well-received academic treatment of congressional leadership. But she chose not to pursue an academic career, in part because of the limited opportunities open to women and in part from a desire to pursue social service. She joined settlement workers in the Roxbury section of Boston, a poor, largely Irish district that would produce James Michael Curley. There she organized the Highland Union, a social club with special emphasis on debating, athletics, and drama (Curley played the lead in at least one production). Follett drew on her Roxbury experiences to help the Women's Municipal League create evening centers based in Boston's schools. By 1913 she had emerged as a leading figure in the social center movement. Drawing on both her experience in practical politics and her academic training, she developed a rationale for social center–style democracy in *The New State: Group Organization the Solution of Popular Government* (1918), which presented social centers as the basis for a new kind of democratic politics designed for a modern, heterogeneous urban society.[42]

For Follett, as for Ward, the starting point for the development of political institutions and processes was diversity, not unity. While many Progressive reformers began with the assumption of public unity, she started with a recognition of the sharp divisions within American urban society. Two decades of grassroots activism and maneuvering through Boston's contentious city politics, not to mention a careful study of the House of Representatives, led her to conclude that "it is a mistake to think that such abstractions as unity and brotherhood etc. are as evident to our wills as to our intellect." Disagreement pervaded urban civic life. Differences of class, race, religion, and political opinion divided people living in cities. The challenge was to create common ground and consensus across these boundaries in a manner that both fostered and profited from such diversity.[43]

Follett envisioned a civic life in which these differences remained—they were both too powerful and too valuable to ignore—but combined to form a more

substantial whole. "Unity, not uniformity, must be our aim," she wrote. "Differences must be integrated, not annihilated or absorbed." Such unity never arrived at a fixed, permanent state; it was always in the process of being made and remade as new ideas and perspectives were introduced and new exchanges took place. In a footnote illustrating this point, she offered a list of words that she believed described the "genuine social process" she sought: "integrate, interpenetrate, interpermeate, compenetrate, compound, harmonize, correlate, coordinate, interweave," and, more awkwardly, "reciprocally relate or adapt or adjust." She also added examples of "bad words," including "fuse, melt, amalgamate, assimilate, weld, dissolve, [and] absorb." The goal was to bring together the ideas of diverse people to create a common opinion and feeling that incorporated (without erasing) each person's perspective into something larger and richer than any individual could formulate alone.[44]

The method of achieving this form of unity was what Follett called the "integrative group process." By that opaque phrase she meant a mode of interaction in which citizens joined together to exchange ideas, learned from each other, and then acted collectively on that basis, a dynamic that characterized the social center in its ideal form. Like Ward, she rejected the debate model in which one opinion triumphs over another and sought instead deliberation that produced a consensus for which all discussants felt a sense of ownership. Differences were essential to this process—it was the commingling of diverse views (Follett called it "interpenetration") that made it possible to generate a richer, better-informed public opinion. "Heterogeneity, not homogeneity," she insisted, created the type of unity necessary for social progress.[45]

Follett's argument constituted in large part a challenge to crowd psychology and its antidemocratic implications. French sociologist Gustave LeBon had argued that unthinking crowds had come to predominate modern society, and efforts at collective action led to irrational and unproductive behavior. Under such circumstances, mass democracy was unworkable, and LeBon's arguments served as the basis for expressions of skepticism about the future of democracy. Influenced by his theories, many reformers and critics doubted democracy could work in a heterogeneous mass society because the public would be too susceptible to demagoguery. Follett challenged LeBon's assumptions, presenting her method as a democratic means of generating public opinion based on reason and cooperation instead of deceptive mass appeals.[46]

Follett also distinguished the group process she described from political pluralism. By the time *The New State* was published, a group of political scientists led by Arthur Bentley and Harold Laski had begun to argue that modern society was constituted by a variety of groups and that the role of government was to mediate among them. Follett devoted a considerable chunk of her book to a

discussion of this theory. In it she applauded the pluralists for their recognition of the salience of social differences but rejected their claim that such differences were insurmountable. Unity and diversity were not inalterably opposed, and she designed the civic order outlined in *The New State* as a means of reconciling the two through interaction and accommodation in a group context. Her rejection of pluralism derived from own experiences: she had witnessed firsthand the ways in which a politics devoted to placating particular interests failed to meet the needs of ordinary people. Pressure-group politics, she contended, did not represent all people equally and did not represent some at all.[47]

The New State also departed from pluralism in its understanding of how government would be constituted. The "state" Follett imagined was in fact a federation of neighborhood-based groups organized first at the citywide level and then on a state and national scale. In this fashion the sentiments and desires of local groups, which reflected the collective wishes of all their members, would be translated into policy. The state thus became "the actual integration of living local groups." These organizations would have official status, with representation on lawmaking bodies such as the city council or the state legislature. Follett was supportive of direct democracy measures as well, but only if combined with the deliberative group processes she advocated. Initiatives and referendums would fail, she warned, if they consisted "merely in counting all the votes in all the ballot boxes."[48]

Throughout *The New State* Follett locates the essential group process in the "neighborhood," language that betrays the fundamentally urban character of her thought. Since her ideas derived largely from her civic experiences in a large, diverse city, so too did most of the examples she employed to illustrate her vision. (She also expected occupational and other interest groups to organize along the same deliberative principles she described for neighborhoods.) When she sketched out her explanation of how neighborhood groups would be integrated into a national state, she asserted that "neither our cities nor our states can ever be properly administered until representatives from neighborhood groups meet to discuss and thereby to correlate the needs of all parts of the city, of all parts of the state." Although "the state" would presumably include rural districts and small towns, Follett rarely discussed such communities.[49]

Follett's vision also carried subtle implications for the gendering of politics. Though she never presented her arguments as feminine in character, she challenged the Darwinian-tinged, conflict-driven masculine approach to public life popularized by party bosses. She rejected as "superficial" what she called the "struggle theory" of progress. Even the metaphorical conception of politics as combat was problematic. "If I 'fight' Mr. X, that means I think of Mr. X as incapable of change—that either he or I must prevail, must conquer." Since the

psychology Follett relied on insisted that people were not fixed entities and that the group process would not only find common ground but redefine the individuals participating in it, such notions of conflict were antiquated. Cooperation, not conflict, was the motive force behind social progress, a formulation that a hypermasculine style could not accommodate.[50]

For all its sophistication, the model of urban politics crafted by Follett, Ward, and other advocates of social centers never took hold. In Rochester the movement drifted away from Ward's emphasis on deliberation once he departed for Wisconsin. After 1915 the national campaign for social centers began to founder, split between factions emphasizing civic deliberation and those promoting recreation and education as their main elements. Latching onto the patriotic fervor surrounding U.S. participation in World War I, social centers shifted toward mobilization efforts, which demanded unthinking unity rather than debate and dissent. Even then it was difficult to escape charges of radicalism. By the 1920s social centers had become "community centers," a name change designed to prevent the conflation of "social" with "socialism." The renamed organizations concentrated on recreation and education rather than on the fostering of deliberative democracy.[51]

Along with the internal divisions and external challenges that undercut the democratic potential of the social center movement, its ambitious reach likely weakened it. The direct challenge to machine politics elicited the predictable response: bosses worked to undercut it. Rochester Republican leader George Aldridge arranged to cut off public funds to that city's social center program in 1910. Follett's evening centers in Boston concentrated on educational and recreational activities for children rather than civic deliberation among adults, a strategy designed in part not to provoke the ire of party politicians holding the purse strings. The hope was that by teaching children better civic habits, reformers could eventually make them into civic-minded adults. Such a method may have had an effect over the long term, but it was unlikely to generate the immediate momentum for change necessary to realize the movement's democratic vision.[52]

Social center organizers displayed more than a few blind spots when theory shifted to practice. In Rochester women were either ignored or shunted into parallel female organizations, arrangements that ensured that half the population was substantially excluded from the deliberations so central to this reform concept. Rochester's organizers cited as a model the civic discussions in the rural schoolhouse where "the men folks got together there, evenings, and decided things." Such declarations seem surprising for advocates of a more democratic politics. They appear to be oblivious to the suffrage movement, arguably the most important attempt to expand democracy in U.S. history, which was approaching a fever pitch at the time. And though Rochester's social centers were

declared open to all regardless of race, the decision to hold a series of blackface minstrel shows suggests that the movement's leaders were not immune to the exclusionary practices of their day.[53]

These limitations point to a more fundamental problem with the movement's approach. Social center advocates assumed that differences were always reconcilable. Ward breezily insisted that when people sat down and talked, "they found, of course, that most of the unpleasant things that they had thought about each other were not so." Proponents deemed Rochester's centers places "where class and race lines, religious and political differences don't count," an assertion that can be read as a claim that the persuasiveness of a person's arguments, not his or her social status, carried the day in civic deliberation. But it also seems to reflect an overly optimistic faith in the ability of people to put aside such prejudices. As Kevin Mattson has noted, even so rigorous a thinker as Mary Parker Follett took it for granted that all differences could be overcome and that unity was always possible.[54]

At times expressions of faith in the possibility of a cooperative, harmonious civic life took on almost mystical qualities. In a speech to the First National Conference on Social Center Development, journalist William Allen White celebrated the potential of these institutions to capture "the wisdom of the common mind." Comparing the centers to the town hall—a "rude temple" that held the "ark of a great covenant"—he argued that centers were a place "for meditation and communion." They created a "common ground where we may stand and, finding our common mind, speak it in a common voice." There was in this shared understanding "a wisdom deeper than that written in any books. The common mind is the wisdom of all books." It was also "kinder than any heart, however tender, for therein is the charity of all hearts"; and it held "a courage firmer than any man's courage, for therein is the courage of comrades, the deepest courage men know." When citizens developed this collective approach sufficiently, it would "build its vision into our life." In his characteristically overwrought fashion, White captured a powerful tendency in Progressive Era political discourse. It was all too easy to assume an established or easily developed unity. The notion that discussion automatically produced consensus was derived from too cursory an understanding of the complex, difficult process conceived by Ward and Follett.[55]

Recognizing how easily others could mischaracterize the social center concept does not provide a basis for dismissing it as simply the naive pursuit of unity or a tool for social control. Ward and Follett aspired to civic unity but recognized the power of social, cultural, economic, and political divisions and the value of varied perspectives. Though Ward in particular evoked the ideal of the town meeting, social center advocates were not offering a nostalgic return to the homogeneous world of village life. Theirs was an urban vision. It started with the recognition

of class, ethnic, and ideological diversity and sought ways of achieving common ground that respected those differences. In this regard Ward, Follett, and their compatriots engaged in a serious attempt to create a democratic template for a modern, heterogeneous urban society.

The ideas and programs of Addams, Ward, Follett, and others who shared their desire for an inclusive and democratic civic life constitute a facet, not the whole, of Progressive urban reform. They were ultimately eclipsed by the drive for change based on a revived faith in consensus, as the next chapter shows. In part their failure resulted from inadequacies in the ideas of the most democratically inclined reformers. But it also stemmed from changes in the mechanics of urban public life and political communication that encouraged simplistic concepts of reform based on the assumption of a latent civic consensus. Regardless, the ideas and endeavors of Addams, Ward, Follett, and their collaborators represented substantial and creative conceptions of how democracy might operate in a plural society. Arguably, they constitute the fullest such effort in American history, one that still warrants serious consideration by those seeking to do the same. Certainly they must weigh heavily in any assessment of Progressivism's legacies.

7

THE PROBLEM WITH THE PUBLIC

Lincoln Steffens and Municipal Reform

The ascent of Lincoln Steffens was nothing short of remarkable. A successful but relatively obscure young journalist working in New York City, he began publishing a series of articles for *McClure's Magazine* in late 1902 that explored the sources of corruption in city politics. These essays struck a nerve, catapulting Steffens to national prominence and establishing him as the nation's leading voice on city politics and municipal reform. Steffens followed up with articles and books on corruption and reform in city, state, and national politics during the first decade of the twentieth century. Civic groups from cities around the country competed for his attention, peppering him with invitations to study their communities and offer advice. Reformers and office seekers considered a favorable pronouncement from Steffens an all-but-certain guarantee of electoral success.

Steffens's decline from this lofty perch was equally striking. He spent a year in Boston trying to implement his ideas, an undertaking that failed to generate the unity he anticipated. As early as 1908 he began to express frustration at the slow pace of change, and his thinking moved leftward. The latter shift, expressed in essays praising Eugene Debs and defending (or so it seemed) the McNamara brothers after they bombed the offices of the *Los Angeles Times,* damaged his reputation and his influence. During the 1910s he traveled abroad to observe and report on the Mexican and Russian revolutions, the latter of which he found compelling, before retiring to a quiet life of writing in his native California.

The rise and fall of Lincoln Steffens seemed to capture the arc of Progressive reform. It began with a call for American citizens to put aside selfish concerns and act in the common interest. Action followed as reformers of all sorts

FIGURE 15. Lincoln Steffens, crusading journalist. Steffens, a leading muckraker, spearheaded efforts to clean up city politics. He sought to remake urban public life by emphasizing the shared pursuit of the common good. His calls for vigorous civic action on behalf of the public interest, which triggered a variety of undertakings with different agendas, inadvertently produced greater pluralism instead of civic unity. The same pattern was evident in municipal reform as a whole. *Puck,* February 21, 1906.

developed a wide array of programs and initiatives built on that idealistic principle. While a good number of these undertakings proved useful, many others failed to work as planned. More frustrating, no shared understanding of the common good emerged, as reformers debated how best to respond to increased business power, political corruption, and various social problems. Disappointments multiplied, popular support for reform faded, and most activists grew increasingly disillusioned.

A closer look at Steffens's engagement with city politics captures another, more subtle and ironic dynamic at work within Progressive reform. His attempt to remake urban public life by emphasizing the pursuit of a singular public good did not simply founder on the shoals of a heterogeneous society. Rather, it fueled political pluralism by encouraging group activities along many different lines. His calls for civic action dedicated to the public interest rarely contemplated the possibility that the public could be constituted in multiple ways. In the end, the many undertakings encouraged by Steffens's formulations diverged, inadvertently promoting the narrow, pressure-group tactics he decried.[1]

Steffens's engagement with municipal reform both encouraged and reflected this centrifugal pattern in urban politics. For a few years, during the 1890s, it appeared that local civic groups in big cities might break with the practices of their Mugwump predecessors by mobilizing workers and immigrants and developing grassroots organizations. But by the early 1900s such efforts had largely given way to a more centralized approach to municipal reform in which a handful of leading businessmen used strategies of mass communication to advance an anti-machine, low-tax, pro-efficiency agenda in the name of the public interest. Steffens's muckraking did not cause this shift, which was under way before his ascent, but it accelerated the trend. His writing on cities inadvertently encouraged the assumption that there was a latent civic unity that required only good-faith action to become manifest. It steered citizens away from the hard work required to forge a sense of common purpose amid the heterogeneity of urban life and instead unleashed a multiplicity of initiatives undertaken in the name of the public good. As the disparity of those efforts became clear, the ideal of consensual politics seemed more elusive than ever. Discouraged, many municipal reformers abandoned the pursuit of the common good and began to think of the public as a collection of contending groups.

These developments would eventually receive theoretical reinforcement. By the end of the Progressive Era, academics devoted to the empirical analysis of public life increasingly concluded that modern society was best understood as a collection of groups with distinctive interests and that politics, stripped to its essentials, was the process of balancing those interests. They pointed to political machines as the best example of this approach to politics, echoing claims

that bosses themselves had long made. By the 1920s, academic assessments of political machines stressed their ability to provide for the needs of the various groups comprising urban society, cementing the legitimacy of these institutions and establishing political pluralism as the dominant framework for understanding urban civic life.

For a time it appeared that elite male municipal reformers might develop a more inclusive civic vision. During the 1890s some liberal reformers, recognizing that they would have to widen their base of support to unseat party machines, sought to mobilize working-class voters on behalf of good government. In Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and especially Chicago, well-heeled male reformers sought to create a cross-class reform movement. With the exception of Chicago's, these efforts were ephemeral. By the early twentieth century, municipal reform moved away from grassroots models that held the potential to find common ground across class and cultural divides. But for at least a moment, the prospect of workingmen and liberal elites, native-born middle class and immigrant poor, uniting in pursuit of civic improvement seemed real.

A new generation of reformers spearheaded these experiments in coalition building. Prominent Mugwumps such as E. L. Godkin, Simon Sterne, and Dorman Eaton had not yet faded from the scene. But alongside them were younger activists who, as Gerald McFarland notes, made "a striking adaptation to the demands of municipal politics." Noting the ephemeral nature of past good-government crusades, they were more open to building organizational structures and forming alliances with labor and ethnic groups. The result was a series of forays into grassroots reform politics that borrowed some of the organizing tactics of party machines. In Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, and Boston new reform groups arose that at first glance seemed merely replications of the older citizens' movements that had sprung up periodically after the Tweed scandal. But on closer inspection, these new groups proved better prepared to deal with the heterogeneity of city life than were their Mugwump predecessors, though they did not abandon entirely their faith in consensus.[2]

Historians have not generally been inclined to acknowledge democratic impulses among municipal reformers. The good-government movement has instead served as the example par excellence of elitist Progressive reform. Scholars arrived at such a verdict with good reason. It is easy to match the names of men heading various reform groups with the listings of the Chamber of Commerce or the Social Register, and many of the structural reforms they pushed led to declining voter participation and less officeholding among the lower classes. But for a short time, at least, even these conservative men acknowledged the value of including workers and immigrants in movements for civic reform.[3]

Launched in 1891, Philadelphia's Municipal League was the first local group of its type to recognize the need for a broader movement. Its founders concluded that earlier campaigns failed both because they were episodic, with reform-minded men banding together for a single election and then returning to their party's fold, and because they were too narrow in social terms. As Clinton Rodgers Woodruff, one of the League's founders, explained, the reform organizations of the 1870s and 1880s "were wanting that element of representation in the American and republican sense." From its inception the League acknowledged the presence of varied interests and perspectives among Philadelphians. An 1894 campaign statement made "special appeals" to "the various groups of business and professional men and wage earners setting forth the importance of good city governments from their distinctive standpoints" and was signed by men "prominent and influential in their respective groups."[4]

This pluralistic approach was reinforced by a grassroots organizational structure. Imitating the party organizations it aimed to unseat, it began to set up ward committees of at least fifty voters in each district and in some instances formed smaller district associations at the precinct level. Each local committee nominated candidates for City Council and sent a representative to the central Board of Managers. No dues were required of members, an arrangement evidently designed to attract the widest possible membership. The intent was to develop an organization that could sustain its efforts beyond a single election and to incorporate a wider range of people in the movement. Though it failed to establish committees in every one of Philadelphia's thirty-seven wards, the League managed to recruit more than five thousand members by 1896, and its Board of Managers drew from not only Mugwump ranks but also academics and small businessmen (labor representatives were notably absent). At its peak, League-sponsored candidates drew 58,000 votes in a municipal election.[5]

A similar mindset drove younger reformers in New York City. The City Club, a new reform organization set up in 1892, established Good Government Clubs in most of the city's Assembly Districts in advance of the 1894 municipal elections. Despite these democratic inclinations, the Club was hardly an open group. Occupying a "splendid" clubhouse on Fifth Avenue, it charged its members the considerable sum of fifty dollars per year in dues, roughly a tenth of a laborer's annual wages. The Club's leaders nevertheless recognized that to be effective, they needed to create a coalition that included men of more modest means. As Edmond Kelly, who spearheaded the grassroots initiative, noted, Club members alone would be "too few, too dainty, and too rich" to defeat Tammany. To attract working-class support, he set up local Good Government Clubs along the same lines as the network of workingmen's clubs that had campaigned so effectively for Henry George in 1886. The plan appeared to work, at least initially. By 1894

there were twenty-four Good Government Clubs spread across the entire city with close to six thousand members all told. Reformers elected anti-Tammany candidate William Strong as mayor that year, a success for which these local reform organizations earned a share of the credit.[6]

While the exact membership in these bodies remains unclear, there is some reason to consider them legitimate attempts at establishing a grassroots, pluralistic political movement. Unlike the City Club, the local groups had relatively modest dues—fifty cents per month after a one-dollar initiation fee—that permitted somewhat wider membership. One purpose of these groups, E. L. Godkin explained, was to reestablish the "old town meeting principle in ward politics." The plan was to stage weekly lectures or debates on a wide range of topics. During 1893 and 1894 local clubs considered far more than calls for structural reforms and upright leadership. The labor question, tenement house reform, and schools were discussed alongside more conventional political reform topics such as ballot reform and civil service legislation. Ultimately, the clubs generated an agenda that encompassed social reforms—including clean streets, pure water, and other sanitary measures—that reflected the needs and concerns of the working class.[7]

In both New York and Philadelphia the efforts of municipal reformers to be more inclusive were both limited and short-lived. Certainly the absence of a serious labor voice as well as the lack of ethnic representation constrained Philadelphia's Municipal League. Nor was it ever as open to reform policies such as the municipal ownership of public utilities which might have attracted greater working-class support. While New York's Good Government movement did call for some social reforms during the 1890s, it never produced sustained engagement with the city's immigrant working class. The modest evidence available for their early activity suggests a largely well-to-do membership. "Good Government Club A" appeared to be a bastion of the upper class; it established a "handsomely furnished" and "luxurious headquarters" on fashionable Lexington Avenue near 58th Street. "Good Government Club B" was organized in the far Upper West Side by a local rector and a businessman, both members of the City Club. Edmond Kelly, who came up with the idea for Good Government Clubs, noted that while they sought to attract "carpenters, masons, plumbers, electricians," and the like, "not one could be induced to join."[8]

In the end, these limitations probably prevented male municipal reformers in both cities from achieving more. Philadelphia's League disbanded in 1904, passing on its ward-level organizations to a new City Party that would experience only modest electoral success during the Progressive Era.[9] In New York the groundswell the clubs generated during the 1894 election seems more a product of anti-Tammany feeling than enthusiasm for fundamental reform. The revelations of the Reverend Charles Parkhurst and the state legislature's Lexow

Commission, which linked the organization to vice and police corruption in sensational fashion, damaged Tammany's standing among many Democratic voters. When Strong proved more of a Republican than a reformer and when subsequent reform campaigns abandoned the fusion method (in which reformers joined forces with one of the two major parties) and insisted on nominating purely independent candidates, the Good Government Clubs faded. By 1899 only half the city's Assembly Districts included such a group, usually under a different name, and they operated as a wing of a predominantly middle- and upper-class reform movement that displayed little interest in recruiting working-class voters.[10]

The most substantial and successful effort to adopt a new approach to municipal reform among male activists was Chicago's Municipal Voters League (MVL). Though some scholars have dismissed the MVL as just another businessmen's group pursuing low taxes and greater efficiency, it was more of a multiclass, pluralistic organization than most have recognized. An offshoot of Chicago's Civic Federation, the MVL sought to incorporate a far wider swath of the city into its movement. Publicity was its key weapon, and it aggressively exposed and publicized fraud and corruption in the hopes of mobilizing popular support for reform candidates and measures. But the MVL also concentrated on the grass roots, organizing on a neighborhood basis and involving citizens from each ward in the process of selecting candidates. The result was a substantial and effective reform campaign that incorporated workers and immigrants.[11]

From its inception the MVL was more than a businessmen's organization. In early 1896 the Civic Federation brought together a collection of business, professional, and labor leaders to create a new reform group devoted to improving city politics. By the end of the year it was organized in every ward in the city, not just the well-to-do districts, and was working to expand its membership in each of them. George Cole, the League's first president, described himself as a "second-class businessman" and proved to be beholden neither to the leading business interests of the city nor to the methods of past good-government associations. Echoing the critique of Chicago civic life articulated by British journalist William Stead a few years before, he was quick to blame the "members of what we call good society" rather than "the boodler" or immigrant voters for the corruption that plagued local public life. Segments of the Chicago labor movement remained key players in the MVL during its early years, and the League's agenda reflected their presence. Nowhere to be found was a proposal for at-large or nonpartisan elections; instead, the League was sharply critical of the corporate interests involved in franchise deals with the city and supportive of sanitary reform, park construction, and utility regulation. It was even open to municipal ownership of street railways and other public utilities.[12]

The core of the MVL's agenda was the election of honest officials. In this regard it differed little from most other Mugwump-inspired municipal reform organizations devoted to electing the best men. The League's purpose, its founders declared, was simply "to promote the nomination and election of aggressively honest and capable" men. The League concentrated on investigating the records and character of men seeking office and publicizing the results in bluntly worded assessments. In a typical report it urged the defeat of "Bathhouse John" Coughlin, labeling him "uneducated and coarse in conduct, the friend of toughs and thugs; a disgrace to his ward and city." The concern for education, conduct, and ties to unrefined urban types followed the script of Godkin's *Tammany Biographies,* playing on middle-class preferences for respectability. With the support of a largely sympathetic city press, such assessments were widely distributed in the weeks before a city election and appeared to produce substantial results.[13]

If the MVL had confined itself to printed condemnations and endorsements, there would be little reason to distinguish it from the numerous good-government organizations that preceded it in Chicago and elsewhere. But two things separated the League from its peers. First, it eschewed structural reforms—the establishment of at-large elections, nonpartisan voting, expert leadership, and centralized authority—that were staples of liberal municipal activism during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era because it deemed such efforts a distraction from the business of electing honest men. Second, the League had an unparalleled commitment to grassroots organization and activity. Though publicity materials emanated from a centralized Executive Committee, the process of selecting candidates did not. Ward committees established in each district usually determined which men the MVL would endorse from that locality. While the League's Executive Committee had final approval of candidates nominated for office in each ward, the choice was made initially by the local committee and only rarely overturned.[14]

This arrangement reflected a key aspect of the League's approach. Rather than challenge the partisan-driven, ward-oriented political culture of Chicago in the fashion of past liberal reformers, it chose to work within those confines. The rejection of structural reforms was also a rejection of the assumption that an easily achieved consensus about what constituted good city government was possible. Instead, the MVL accepted, at least implicitly, the possibility of different priorities and needs in different parts of the city and the different social groups within them. It also trusted local activists to know the situation in the ward and to select good men. It treated parties as legitimate institutions and was willing to work with organizational leaders to select mutually acceptable candidates. Only as a last resort did the League run an independent candidate.

The result of these tactics was a notably diverse array of candidates and considerable electoral success. From the start, the MVL supported workingmen and immigrants. Its 1896 slate included candidates of Irish, Bohemian, Italian, and German extraction. Among these candidates were a machinist, a plumber, a druggist, and a doctor as well as several leaders of the local labor movement. The League backed a similarly diverse set of candidates in 1900, including workers, small businessmen, and professional men from a variety of ethnic groups. It also consciously struck a balance of Republicans (16) and Democrats (11) and even endorsed a Russian socialist in one ward. MVL leaders were careful not to be overly choosy; they were willing to back a questionable candidate if the alternative was a certainly corrupt one. This pragmatism and the League's willingness to construct a broad and diverse ticket worked. The MVL drew support from both middle-class voters sympathetic to reform and working-class voters who had supported Populist and labor candidates in past elections. That coalition meant the League carried 26 of the 34 races in which it endorsed candidates during its first year. By 1898, after just three city elections, only 7 of the 53 aldermen who had held office in 1896 remained, and MVL-endorsed aldermen constituted a clear majority of the Board.[15]

Such diversity marked a considerable advance over the reform efforts of local Mugwumps during the preceding two decades. In establishing a grassroots presence and endorsing candidates from different class and ethnic backgrounds, the MVL displayed a pluralistic mindset that its predecessors had not. The emphasis on probity permitted room for political differences. After ten years of activism the League concluded that "in wards where the fundamental honesty of aldermanic candidates is not the issue it is right for voters to divide upon questions of municipal policy. The Municipal Voters League is striving to bring about a situation in which voters may safely divide upon such questions."[16]

For a short time, the MVL served as a national model for municipal reform. It earned considerable national attention after a flattering profile by Lincoln Steffens in *McClure's*. Boston's new businessmen's reform group, the Good Government Association (GGA), explicitly copied the MVL, establishing nominating committees in each ward to vet city council candidates. But the commitment to grassroots politics was fleeting in Boston, and the GGA soon abandoned localized work to concentrate on mass publicity produced by a tightly run executive committee made up of prominent men. Its principal methods were publicity and advertising, which it used to proclaim its endorsements on the assumption that its imprimatur was all that was necessary to establish a candidate's reform bona fides. "The whole basis of the movement," the GGA's leadership proclaimed in an announcement heralding the new organization, "is the belief confidently

held…that a majority of the citizens of Boston wish to see honest and capable men in office."[17]

Boston's example reflected the larger trend in municipal reform. In most cases, the goal was simply to mobilize those who shared elite reformers' faith in the "gospel of honest government on business principles." The assumption was that if citizens were fully informed and morally sound, they would join in the reform movement. Those who opposed the reformers were by definition either ill-informed or morally corrupt. The ever-perceptive E. L. Godkin noted the heterogeneous character of New York City, but it did not follow from his estimation that the city's politics should reflect the differences among its residents. Instead, he concluded that in its midst it was necessary to create a permanent organization for people who "agree…about public affairs." Philadelphia's reformers thought in similar terms. The Municipal League defined itself primarily as an educational organization committed to fiscal restraint. It imagined the city as "a joint stock affair in which the taxpayers are the stockholders." Along with the class-inflected reference to taxpayers—in this context the term meant property holders—came the assumption that shared financial interests defined urban citizenry and that cultural and social differences had no place in city politics.[18]

It was this impulse to speak for the whole, rather than to conduct grassroots work, that would characterize Progressive Era municipal reform. Even the MVL's commitment to ground-level politics would fade, particularly after its absorption into the more conventional Citizens' Association. More significant, a national consensus developed about the proper approach to municipal reform that gave little consideration to the heterogeneity of the city. That view received its firmest expression in the proposals of the National Municipal League (NML), an organization formed by reformers from northeastern and midwestern cities. Spurred by the exposés of Charles Parkhurst and William Stead, they organized the First Conference on Good City Government, which took place in Philadelphia in early 1894. The League went on to stage annual meetings at which the problems of city government and city politics were discussed.[19]

Shared assumptions about reform bound together the men (and a handful of women) who gathered in Philadelphia. They believed, in Kenneth Fox's words, "that municipal improvement could only come about through the forceful assertion of massed public opinion, guided by skillful elite leadership." This concept was best exemplified by the Municipal Program the NML produced in 1899. It included a model city charter featuring a strong mayor and a unicameral city council with members elected on a nonpartisan, at-large basis for six-year terms. The intent of these changes, which reflected mainstream reform thought and guided local activists in many cities through the Progressive Era, was to limit partisan influence in city politics and to ensure educated leadership.[20]

The NML's Municipal Program rested on a notion of consensus. It assumed that most people shared a common sense of what constituted good government. The central challenge of reform was stimulating this often latent public opinion and installing the institutions necessary to its expression. Nonpartisan, at-large elections were designed to end machine rule, the fundamental impediment to this goal. Absent was any serious consideration of the possibility that different groups might have different ideas of what constituted good government. When the League adopted its Municipal Program, one dissenter noted that the decision to abandon ward-based voting for at-large elections meant ignoring salient social differences. "Are there not in every city sectional divisions with tolerably distinct municipal interests and some element of social life?" he protested. "Such divisions ought to be recognized and emphasized in the political system."[21]

Gender concerns shaped the development of pluralistic, grassroots politics among municipal reformers. As Rebecca Edwards and others have argued, Republicans and Democrats depicted third parties and reform campaigns as feminine activities. To accentuate the point, politicians sharpened their usual masculinity. Anxious to avoid a similar taint, municipal reformers began to do the same. Their rhetoric grew increasingly masculine, stressing manliness, aggression, and a willingness to fight, characteristics that served to distinguish them from earlier reformers who had been dismissed as effeminate and ineffectual.[22]

By the middle of the 1890s it was hard to find municipal reformers who were not spoiling for a fight or at least forceful action. Chicago's MVL proudly declared its intent to nominate and elect "aggressively honest and capable men." New York reformers launched Good Government Clubs because the elite City Club's members were not only "too few" but "too dainty." The new grassroots bodies, by contrast, were to be "organized, persistent, and aggressive." Philadelphia's Municipal League aimed to provide the "vigor" that was missing from earlier reform groups. Its leaders consciously copied parties because those organizations possessed "the sinews of war," something reform groups heretofore lacked. The MVL's George Cole proclaimed that "our city is staggering under a heavy weight of fraud and corruption, which must be met and conquered." He also praised the League's initial candidates, who "stood like a rock against the tide of corruption." Another MVL activist promised "a fight between the people and the people's interests on one side, and the corrupt corporations on the other."[23]

Assertions of masculinity by the MVL and its counterparts included a degree of pluralism. Such manliness was often associated with working-class men and provided the basis for cross-class cooperation in pursuit of reform. It represented a departure from the version of masculinity espoused by elite liberal reformers, which stressed the use of reason as a key quality of male leadership (and dismissed women as too emotional to possess civic authority). But the newfound

vigor of municipal reform also elevated action over thoughtfulness and did little to foster a politics rooted in rational debate and the exchange of ideas among people with different interests and perspectives.[24]

The rise of Lincoln Steffens both reflected and accelerated the tendency to assert civic consensus instead of building it. Confident that a civic awakening was readily achievable, he encouraged reformers to act as the voice of a singular people instead of collaborating with others. While Steffens grew increasingly conscious of and sympathetic to working-class concerns personally, the political prescriptions he offered presupposed unity, even across class lines. He also reinforced the masculine tone of municipal reform, praising male activists for their firmness and aggression, attributes that discouraged efforts to promote deliberation and dialogue. These attributes inadvertently fostered a group-driven politics, a process Steffens himself fueled directly when he applied his ideas to the civic life of Boston in 1908 and 1909.

Steffens came to politics through journalism. The son of a successful Sacramento banker, he flirted with an academic life after graduating from the University of California. He spent three years studying philosophy in Europe before returning to the United States and taking a reporter's job at E. L. Godkin's *New York Evening Post.* He proved an able writer and editor, moving up the paper's ranks quickly. In 1897 he became managing editor of the moribund *New York Commercial Advertiser.* A willingness to let his reporters employ lively personal styles and a focus on colorful, usually sentimental, accounts of city life helped Steffens turn that paper around in short order. S. S. McClure hired him to write and edit for his popular magazine in 1901 and soon thereafter sent him off to look for stories in cities. The result was a provocative series of articles on municipal corruption. Published in 1902 and 1903, they proved so successful that he continued with another series investigating wrongdoing at the state level and a series of articles for newspapers on political problems in Washington, D.C. He also compiled his municipal articles into a popular book, *The Shame of the Cities* (1904), and the pieces on state politics into a second volume, *The Struggle for Self Government* (1906). Answering critics who charged that Steffens spent too much time exposing problems and too little proposing solutions, he published a series of articles featuring successful reformers, which he collected in his third book, *Upbuilders* (1909). Steffens also wrote in support of numerous reform-minded office seekers and undertook a yearlong study of Boston with the intent of completing a book-length analysis of its civic problems and their solutions.[25]

The goal of this work was to create a public opinion that insisted on honest, efficient government. "All we have to do is establish a steady demand for good government," he wrote in the introduction to *Shame of the Cities.* Voters should

vote only "for the city, and the State, and the Nation," he argued. If they did this, they would force politicians to respond to popular desires. The role of reform leaders—Joseph Folk in St. Louis, the men of the Municipal Voters League in Chicago, Robert LaFollette in Wisconsin, Mark Fagan in Jersey City—was to cultivate this demand by presenting the issue clearly. Steffens praised Chicago's reformers for creating in local public life "only one line of demarcation: special interests versus the interests of the city." At times Steffens was pessimistic about the prospect of creating sustained popular demand for effective government even when the issue was put so clearly, but he rarely ventured beyond this model of reform in his writing before 1910.[26]

In condemning a politics of private interest and reasserting the primacy of the public good, Steffens revived aspects of the republican vocabulary that had animated political reform efforts through the nineteenth century. His repeated condemnation of the businessman as the main cause of corruption, and business values as the antithesis of good citizenship, echoed the traditional republican lament that commercialism corrupted public life by undermining civic virtue. Steffens introduced *The Struggle for Self Government* with an acidly sarcastic "Dedication to the Czar," in which he suggested that American constitutional democracy differed little from the despotic government offered by Russia's beleaguered ruler, a comparison that drew on the traditional contrast between democracy and monarchy. And his constant warnings about the growth of an "oligarchy representative of special interests" paralleled republicanism's fear of power concentrated in the hands of the few.[27]

Woven into this formula was a gendered understanding of good citizenship. The heroes in Steffens's stories were invariably men who took their responsibilities as citizens or public officials seriously and acted aggressively. He introduced Joseph Folk as "one man, working all alone, but he is the Circuit (district or State) Attorney, and he is 'doing his duty.'" The grand jury in Minneapolis that brought down the Ames machine was able to do so because "there was a man among them who was a fighter." Local boss "Doc" Ames, in contrast, emerged in Steffens's telling as a kindly but weak-willed man who allowed corruption to flourish. The problem of reform in Chicago came down to finding the right man: "all they needed was a fighter. So it was moved to find a man, and let this man find eight other men, who should organize the 'Municipal Voters' League.'" Of Wisconsin reformer A. R. Hall, Steffens wrote, "I have seen in my day some seventeen men, real men and none of them is simpler, truer, braver than this ex-leader of the Wisconsin Assembly."[28]

As it did when employed by other reformers, this masculine language helped rehabilitate the idea of reform but also limited it. In celebrating the bravery and vigor of his citizen-heroes, Steffens countered the popular Gilded Age claim that

reform was chiefly a feminine exercise, the province of "long-haired men and short-haired women," as the phrase went. He was hardly the first to do so—his friend Theodore Roosevelt was a pioneer of a political style that married masculinity and reform—but Steffens certainly helped make reform consistent with notions of manly aggression. In doing so, he also promoted a model of citizenship that stressed action over reflection. Chicago's successful reformers were "not thinking of principles and methods. Work was their instinct and the fighting has always been thick." The exercise of reason and the exchange of ideas—core elements of the deliberative model of democracy—were lost in Steffens's rush to create a more pragmatic, virile persona for his heroes.[29]

Steffens should have known better. He developed personal or political relationships with several reformers who recognized the need to create institutions and spaces where various groups and interests could work out their differences. He was particularly close to Frederic Howe and Tom Johnson, yet he never seemed to grasp the idea behind their open tent meetings. He also corresponded with Edward Ward, but again he appeared not to develop a full appreciation for Ward's attempts to provide a setting in which members of social groups that otherwise had little contact with each other could discuss matters of public concern. Ward urged Steffens to write about these ideas in 1908 and even succeeded in luring him to Rochester to inspect his work. Yet Steffens the muckraker never adequately incorporated into his thinking the essential principles of the social center: the acceptance of multiple understandings of the common good and the need to reconcile them through deliberation.[30]

Steffens did not entirely ignore the class and group differences increasingly evident in turn-of-the-century America. He made a point of rejecting group-based explanations of the country's political ills because he sought to blame the people as a whole for their tolerance of corruption. *The Shame of the Cities* emphatically dismissed past attempts to link political malfeasance to immigrants: "the 'foreign element' excuse is one of our hypocritical lies that save us from the clear sight of ourselves." Philadelphia was the worst-governed city in the country, according to Steffens, and also one of the "most American." One of the city's few credible reformers, he added parenthetically, was an immigrant. "No one class is at fault," he insisted, "nor any one breed, nor any particular interest or group of interests." But if Steffens acknowledged the presence of group differences, he aimed to erase them rather than accommodate them, and he never conceived of an ideal of citizenship that took multiple values and priorities into account.[31]

The closest Steffens came to allowing for the possibility of competing yet legitimate formulations of the public good was in brief endorsements of party rehabilitation. He praised Robert LaFollette for organizing a personal machine in Wisconsin and working inside Republican Party lines as a practical approach

to reform. In *The Struggle for Self Government* he argued that if voters acted independently instead of as partisans they would force parties to "represent good citizenship." That is, parties would develop different but morally valid positions on "broad questions of public policy" and thus "would both stand, as they do not now, for the public interest." Although the public interest remained for him a singular term, Steffens at least ventured the possibility of multiple approaches to achieving it. But this insight never went further. Even in *Upbuilders,* written well after his exposure to the ideas of Johnson, Howe, and Ward, Steffens still expressed a vague faith in "the common people" and a definition of good leadership and citizenship as devotion to a simplistic understanding of the public good.[32]

These shortcomings may have enhanced the impact of Steffens's writing. His muckraking entered (and helped define) the mass literary marketplace that emerged around the start of the twentieth century.[33] Carefully written to appeal to an expanding magazine readership, it aimed to attract attention, encourage reform, and sell magazines. In every respect Steffens succeeded. Not only did the circulation of *McClure's Magazine* grow during its muckraking years (during which it featured not only Steffens's writings but also the work of muckrakers Ida Tarbell and Ray Stannard Baker, among others), but the commentary his articles fueled in local newspapers and their republication in book form multiplied his audience and amplified his arguments. Within a few years of his first *McClure's* article, "Tweed Days in St. Louis," Steffens had garnered substantial credit for shifting public opinion in favor of municipal reform throughout the country.

The power of Steffens's exposés flowed from the careful construction of his articles. The material he used was almost entirely public knowledge, as he himself admitted, and his ideas were for the most part unoriginal. But unlike highbrow nineteenth-century accounts of political corruption, his articles featured narrative drive, dramatic tension, lively dialogue, and humor. Directed at the broad middle-class audience of *McClure's Magazine,* they had a freshness derived from the storytelling skills Steffens had developed as a reporter and editor (and occasional short-story writer) during the 1890s. McClure, a pioneer in the field of mass-market magazines, also edited Steffens's early work heavily, frequently restructuring it to give it clearer narrative flow and greater drama. He urged Steffens to connect each article to its predecessors and provided the provocative title for the second series of muckraking articles, "Enemies of the Republic." The result was an expression of traditional ideas about civic declension in an innovative format designed to reach a wide readership.[34]

Steffens's ability to command popular attention flowed in large part from the platform *McClure's* provided. Launched by S. S. McClure in 1893, it was among the first and most successful of a new breed of inexpensive magazines that extended periodical readership well beyond the levels achieved by the highbrow

publications of the Gilded Age. By 1903 its circulation was 370,000, and it rose to 414,000 by 1906. *Shame of the Cities* sold three thousand copies and *Struggle for Self Government* another one thousand. But these numbers do not do justice to the reach of Steffens's investigations. Newspapers routinely echoed his criticism, particularly when it focused on their own cities, and reform politicians constantly reiterated his charges on the stump.[35]

One can trace the development of Steffens's influence in the reactions of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* to his revelations about that city. His initial accounts of local political corruption, "Tweed Days in St. Louis" (published in October 1902) and "The Shamelessness of St. Louis" (published in March 1903), met with a defensive response. The paper labeled Steffens's account "intemperate" and urged local voters to refute the charge that they tolerated corruption and cared little for the public good. Part of the paper's commentary may have stemmed from its Democratic sympathies, since the principal target of the exposés was that party's leadership. But even Joseph Folk noted the anxiety provoked by Steffens's writings and cited a broad campaign in the city to discredit his claims. A year later, after the "Shame of the Cities" series was complete and Steffens had moved on to an examination of state politics that included Missouri, the response was markedly different. The *Post-Dispatch* praised Steffens's work and even accepted the terms he used to frame his discussion of corruption. When Folk indicted Democratic boss Ed Butler, the paper celebrated the occasion as a "lesson St. Louis needs" to arouse the city from the "fatalism and apathy" that had long characterized it. The paper's about-face reflected the growing power of Steffens's voice. By 1904 nobody spoke with more authority about the problems of American urban politics.[36]

Knowledgeable observers thought Steffens had a decisive effect on public opinion. Some begged for his help: "I believe an article by you as an admitted expert would be the best campaign document available," pleaded a San Francisco reformer. In the days immediately following elections congratulatory telegrams and letters poured into his home and office. They uniformly assigned him a large share of the credit for reform triumphs and for the pro-reform mood of the country generally. When he featured specific reformers in his articles, often to boost their electoral fortunes, they emphatically attributed their victories to his intervention. Joseph Folk, Brand Whitlock, Tom Johnson, Everett Colby, and Robert LaFollette were among the many politicians who viewed Steffens's articles as a powerful factor in their success. As LaFollette declared of a Steffens piece that focused on the Wisconsin reformer, "it would have gratified you and Mrs. Steffens to know—though, of course you have found it everywhere—the way in which the article settled things. It was like the decision of a court of last resort."[37]

It is easy to see how Steffens's muckraking career both fueled and exemplified the politics of advertising and publicity that emerged around the turn of the century. His articles and books explicitly aimed to arouse popular support for reform; many of them attempted to influence specific elections, usually to great effect. At the peak of his influence, reformers and politicians throughout the country believed that even an enthusiastic comment from Steffens deployed in an advertisement or press release could turn an election in their favor. One of the men who hired Steffens to investigate Boston politics admitted as much, noting that reformers in that city had decided to "get current with the rest and advertise. That is, to study the people psychologically and move them as our opponents move them by feelings, even by their prejudices." In short, Steffens was at the center of the developing effort to manipulate mass opinion which displaced more traditional, decentralized means of mobilizing political support.[38]

It is less obvious, but no less the case, that Steffens's influential ideas contributed to the growth of a plural, interest-group-driven politics. With its emphasis on a single, unified people, Steffens's political creed would seem to have contradicted the centrifugal forces at work in American civic culture. But despite his attempt to rally a singular public, Steffens's muckraking mobilized not one but many publics. His work thus encouraged a far more plural, contested civic life than he ever imagined. The Progressive reformers with whom he worked most closely and who were the heroes of his narratives acted in the name of the public interest but came to represent more narrowly defined particular interests. Their ultimate demise arose largely from their inability to speak credibly for all the people of their community, a failure that undercut Steffens's reputation and fed the disillusion and radicalism for which he later became famous.

Hints of this difficulty were evident in the responses to Steffens's muckraking. After reading "Half Free and Fighting On," his article about municipal reform in Chicago, labor activist Margaret Dreier Robbins urged Steffens to return to Chicago in 1906 to investigate local school politics. She was alarmed by what she saw as the growing influence of businessmen—"the privileged interests of the city"—on the Board of Education and expected Steffens to be sympathetic to her point of view. Less than two years later a Chicago businessman wrote Steffens to solicit his help in demonstrating the corruption of "several of our leading politicians" in a manner that would "open up the way to the men 'higher up' in the business world." (The latter entreaty apparently ignored what was by then routine criticism of businessmen in Steffens's muckraking.) Despite their diametric opposition to each other, both correspondents read in Steffens work support for their agendas, testimony to the vagueness of his ideas and their capacity for fueling contradictory political activity.[39]

Steffens's one major foray into practical reform provides the fullest illustration of this multiplication effect. Reacting to criticism that he and other muckrakers spent too much time criticizing and not enough time seeking solutions, Steffens finally resolved to put his ideas to the test. Several cities offered him the chance to come and study their situation and propose reforms before he settled on an offer from Boston retail magnate Edward A. Filene and the city's Good Government Association (GGA). They paid him $10,000 to spend a year in Boston investigating its problems, publishing his findings, and proposing constructive responses to existing difficulties. His experiment went badly, largely because his conception of a united public was a poor match for the complexity of metropolitan life.

The Boston opportunity attracted Steffens by offering him a chance to go beyond criticism to constructive reform. By 1908 the muckraking movement had waned, stung by the complaints of Theodore Roosevelt—who coined the derisive epithet "muckraker"—and many others that it did little more than wallow in the corruption and failures of American life. Steffens bristled at these charges, insisting that while he had "'raked' much 'muck' as they are pleased to term it," he had "written about more good men than I have exposed bad ones. They who apply the term 'muckraker' seem to forget that." Boston gave him a chance to engage in "the constructive side" of the effort "to restore self government," as his wife put it a press release trumpeting his investigation there. Filene put it even more dramatically: "the work here as it is outlining itself bids fair to be one of the most important ever done in this country, and might well be made to rank in importance with anything that has been done either nationally or in any state or city within our memory at least."[40]

The careful study of a single city would allow Steffens to develop and implement his ideas about civic reform. Here was the test of his claim that an intelligent, united public opinion could be cultivated that would force political leaders to act for the common good. "I have come to Boston looking for good," he noted on his arrival in the city, expressing confidence that "some feelings for and some conscience about the common problems of community living" already existed there. His task would be to energize and enlarge that collective "conscience" and direct it toward productive ends.[41]

The Boston sponsors gave their muckraker-for-hire two specific charges. The Good Government Association agreed to pay half of Steffens's salary for the year in exchange for a book-length manuscript that would lay bare the city's political failings. The Association wanted to publish these findings in an inexpensive volume during the run-up to the crucial municipal election scheduled for January 1910 in the hopes of swaying the election its way. Filene, paying the other half, wanted Steffens to work on the creation of one or more civic organizations that would offer effective, unifying responses to the social, political, and economic

problems the city faced. Steffens and his wife moved to Boston in the fall of 1908, and he began the work necessary to fulfill these obligations.

In the first of these endeavors Steffens failed, at least from the point of view of his employers. The GGA planned to market a five-cent edition of his book just a few weeks before the mayoral election. Its effect would be "psychological," the Association's leaders hoped, swaying popular opinion against Irish Democrat John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald and in favor of elite Yankee reformer James Storrow. The GGA expected Steffens to do for Boston what he had done so effectively in other cities and states—describe conditions in a way that mobilized the public in support of political reform. But not only did Steffens fail to deliver on time, completing his manuscript more than two years after the election took place; he failed to provide the indictment of machine politics that the Boston reformers anticipated. Instead, he attacked "the ideals of the reformers," who served the interests of "the financial, commercial, and employer classes" but failed to seek "any legislation for labor or humanity."[42]

Steffens's Boston story acknowledged class differences but went no further, and it had little effect locally or nationally. The GGA refused to publish the book, which appeared in serial form instead in *Metropolitan Magazine* in 1914 to little fanfare. By then Steffens's influence had diminished sharply, the result of a leftward shift in his politics, and he was lucky to get the study published in any form. Even if it had gained a wider audience, it was characteristically vague and had little to offer beyond a general indictment of the business classes. Although it placed far greater emphasis on social reform than his earlier muckraking, it provided sparse detail about what sort of policies he sought or how class differences might be overcome.[43]

While in Boston, Steffens put most of his energy into the second of his two responsibilities. At the behest of Filene he spent the year encouraging and helping to formulate civic action throughout the city. He spoke to labor organizations, neighborhood improvement societies, church groups, and a range of other bodies, exhorting each to enter public affairs more vigorously and to make its influence felt. He also had a direct role in the creation of two new organizations, the United Improvement Association (UIA), a federation of neighborhood civic associations, and the "Boston-1915" campaign, an attempt to establish a "city movement" that would unite the community behind a comprehensive program of reform.

In helping to launch the UIA, Steffens emphasized the role of its constituent groups, the neighborhood associations, as the voice of the people. Formed as nonpartisan organizations during the 1890s and early 1900s, these groups typically cast themselves as alternatives to self-interested, corrupt party politics. Steffens visited many of them during his year in Boston, praising their efforts and

urging cooperation among them. Addressing members of one such body, he told them that they brought "a consciousness of the ward as whole" to their work and were thus in a position "to express the demands of the people" more effectively than were machine politicians. Effective representation required someone "loyal to the community as a whole," he told another civic group. The idea behind the formation of the UIA was to create a nonpartisan vehicle through which to express the collective desires of these groups.[44]

But while these neighborhood bodies employed the rhetoric of the public interest, they acted more narrowly. Their membership invariably came from the uppermost slice of the socioeconomic scale. In most instances a handful of upper- and middle-class businessmen ran them. The UIA thus emerged as a suburban lobbying group, carrying the desires of these middle-class associations to city hall and the state house. During its first years in existence it pressed for faster street construction and improved municipal and utility service in outlying neighborhoods, lower property taxes, and more vigorous regulation of telephone rates. These concerns were most clearly relevant to suburban homeowners and often less important to working-class ethnics in other sections of the city.[45]

While Steffens cannot be held solely responsible for these developments, he certainly encouraged them. Part of the problem was his conception of how the public interest was constituted. When forced to articulate his ideas beyond vague generalities about the people, he accepted the increasingly common assumption that the public interest represented an accumulation of group interests, which would magically coalesce into a unified, consistent whole. As he explained to one of the neighborhood civic associations he addressed in Boston, "if your representatives here at City Hall were your representatives, you could get anything you wanted and make Boston purer, cleaner, safer and more beautiful than any city in the world." The naiveté of the assumption that "anything you wanted" would include only public-spirited desires is topped only by the notion that such demands, in all their variety, would readily lead to a "pure, cleaner, safer, and more beautiful" city. By encouraging this kind of thinking while speaking as an authority on American politics, Steffens implied that the differences among Bostonians were of little import. At the same time, he contributed substantially to the clamor for satisfaction emanating from so many different quarters in early twentieth-century America which exacerbated those differences.[46]

Even more tangible were Steffens's contributions to the "Boston-1915" movement, the official campaign to forge civic unity and expand civic improvement. His idea was to present a "vision of the future of Boston" derived from the efforts of various reform groups. "We'd find out what everybody was planning to do in business, politics, religion, and social reform," Steffens recalled, "and spread out all of these plans as one united Plan for Boston." The centerpiece of

the program was a massive exhibit of the work of local churches, unions, civic bodies, settlement houses, fraternal groups, and others. Held in late 1909, the 1915 fair attracted more than 200,000 visitors and featured 1,658 organizations. Steffens and the movement's architects hoped that those who saw the fair would be so inspired by its tangible presentation of "the city as it might be made" that they would become better citizens, selflessly devoted to the goals sketched out in the displays.[47]

Steffens came closer in this effort to constructing a formula for bridging group differences than he had in any of his muckraking articles. By this time he had grown more sympathetic to radical critiques of capitalism, and his proposals reflected this new thinking. As one part of the 1915 movement Steffens urged that "the people of Boston should take up and resolve in a fine spirit of reciprocity questions involving the relations between employers and employees." He expressed particular concern that those outside the business community have a voice in the project, objecting strongly to a proposal to give the Chamber of Commerce the lead role because it was a "class organization." Inclusiveness was central to Steffens's vision: "every man, woman and child in the city should be asked the question: 'what are you willing to do for Boston?'" he declared. He even called for a physical space where interchange and mutual support could be fostered: a headquarters "where every organization and every citizen can get advice and help at all times and each can get the cooperation of all others when times of discouragement come and help is most needed."[48]

But if Steffens was finally acknowledging the plurality of interests at work in urban society, he developed no mechanisms for resolving the differences among them. He assumed that inclusion was sufficient, that the conflicts between groups would work themselves out once all were incorporated into "the City Movement," as he called it. This faith in comity reached absurd levels. The part of the 1915 plan devoted to transportation called for "public deliberations between the transportation interests and the public." These discussions, it added, were "to be guided by the assumption that the true interests of the transportation companies and the public are identical." Unlike the social center movement promoted by Edward Ward and Mary Follett or the civic theories espoused by Jane Addams, Steffens's 1915 idea never fully recognized the importance of dialogue and exchange—it was rooted in the belief that social and economic differences were not politically significant, that civic harmony existed in a dormant state that required only activation in the form of greater civic participation to take effect. It does not appear that he even took notice of Follett's work, which was under way in Boston while he was there. (The 1915 Executive Committee considered Ward for the directorship of the organization before settling on another candidate. Perhaps the movement would have developed along different lines

had it chosen him.) Steffens was not entirely responsible for the inadequacy of the 1915 vision—he acted largely as an adviser, and his influence waned once he left town and others took charge—but his initial proposal set the course for the movement, one that never fully came to grips with the diversity of the city and the difficulty of creating a common civic vision in the face of it.[49]

This failure led Steffens and others in the 1915 campaign to fall back on the traditional notion of a singular people. For all their insistence on the incorporation of many groups into the movement, they still imagined the end result as a morally united citizenry expressing its demands in one voice. "We should find out in great detail the wants of Boston and state them in the form of a general platform," Steffens wrote in his initial recommendation, assuming that "Boston" was a monolithic entity with a complex but ultimately coherent set of desires. "We shall seize the imagination of the people," he continued, "and interest them in politics and pledge candidates to support this platform and as far as possible give public officials the satisfaction of knowing what the people really want." This vision defined the 1915 movement, which according to one observer was founded in the idea "that the common impulses of the great mass of the people are in the long run, right, and that if gathered up and organized as never before, these impulses will make up a constructive power in civic life beyond anything now at the command of the agencies of righteousness."[50]

Such confidence in the sagacity and moral cohesion of the people proved to be misplaced. The 1915 movement fizzled, and the wave of popular enthusiasm it triggered crested quickly. In January 1912 the Executive Committee dissolved the official organization, citing the many groups now carrying forward different parts of the agenda laid out in 1909. Among them were organizations devoted to housing reform, education, recreation, and civic reform. It also cited the work of recently created public bureaucracies, institutional structures that encouraged pressure-group politics far more readily than they did the mechanisms of grassroots deliberative democracy. The committee's Final Report stressed a "record of united action," but these words rang hollow as many separate efforts filled the void left by "the city movement" Steffens had originally imagined.[51]

Steffens's idea proved diversifying in other ways as well. In the name of unity it fueled variety. The original exhibition endorsed and publicized the work of the 1,658 groups it featured, undoubtedly strengthening many of them in the process. The 1915 campaign staged fourteen conferences for groups with common interests; each meeting produced a public report and encouraged formal activities, particularly lobbying.[52] This range of activity testified more to the plurality of interests and concerns at work in an urban context than it did the unity of the city. Steffens got the increased citizen activism he had been seeking from the beginning of his muckraking career, but it never coalesced into the single

movement he envisioned because the ideas, interests, and goals of those mobilized varied widely. The legacy of the 1915 movement—and the legacy of Steffens's call for a more engaged citizenship—was not unity but diversity.

The pattern evident in Steffens's Boston intervention also revealed itself elsewhere, perhaps most notably in the attempt to rewrite Chicago's city charter. Leading municipal reform groups, including the Municipal Voters League, the Citizens' Association, and the Civic Federation, spearheaded the effort, seeking to centralize authority, establish independence from state control, and reform the electoral process. The document they produced for popular consideration proposed a modest set of changes. Its structural alterations were limited, particularly in its preservation of a ward-based system for electing aldermen. It was also relatively open to populist measures such as municipal ownership of public utilities. Its authors hoped that it would generate "the unity of the people" in support of the plan. But the process of formulating the new charter was exclusive, making such harmony elusive. The proposal adopted by a 1906 charter convention, with little input from labor or ethnic voices, soon encountered fierce criticism from those groups excluded in the drafting process. That opposition proved enough to sink it, and with it the idea that politics in Chicago might proceed from notions of unity.[53]

The presence of multiple and varied understandings of the public good drove the defeat of charter reform in Chicago. The authors of the proposed charter were convinced that they had acted "not for their own purposes, not for their own use, not for their own benefit, but for the benefit of all the city for all the time." Others were less confident of their altruism. The opposition included women's groups, labor organizations, and the United Societies for Local Self Government (USLSG), a federation of locally based ethnic groups. These groups understood their opposition as a defense of the collective interests of the city. They had "differing perceptions of good municipal government," as Maureen Flanagan has argued. They disagreed with conventional reformers about what was in the best interest of the city as a whole on matters related to home rule, liquor licensing, city schools, the regulation of public utilities, and other issues. At bottom, they saw the proposed charter as a measure that would benefit the city's business elite at the expense of other groups. They had, in short, a particular sense of who the people were, who the special interests were, and what constituted the common good.[54]

Faith in a unified public as the basis for municipal reform was difficult to sustain in the face of such divisions. Enthusiasm for the strong mayor/at-large council model of city government—the central element of the National Municipal League's 1899 model charter—had cooled noticeably by 1910 as reformers

acknowledged the necessity of allowing representation of distinctive, geographically based interests at city hall. Charles Beard, an active municipal reformer who worked with the NML and New York's Municipal Research Bureau, expressed mixed feelings in 1912 about an increasingly popular municipal innovation, commission government, because it did not allow for deliberation among representatives of the various interests that constituted urban populations. Proponents of municipal efficiency bureaus, a signature feature of mainstream municipal reform, increasingly found themselves having to explain that their bodies were something more than technocratic devices designed to circumvent democratic rule. A few reformers even expressed some sympathy for the proposals of municipal socialists, despite the latter's emphasis on class differences. Such sentiments did not prevail in reform circles, but they hinted at the emergence of doubts about the viability of models that did not sufficiently take into account urban heterogeneity.[55]

The reformers of the National Municipal League all but ignored perhaps the most serious attempt to reconcile urban heterogeneity and the common good. The League flirted briefly with Edward Ward's concept of social centers, forming a committee devoted to the idea in 1909. But save for a series of papers on the topic presented in 1910, it remained wedded to reforms built on the notion of consensual politics. The committee disbanded in 1911, and the social center concept never became part of the NML's program. Even during the period from 1912 to 1917, when the social center movement was at its peak, the NML concentrated on more mechanistic ways of accommodating diversity that did not involve deliberation as a means of defining the common good.[56]

The strongest indication of wavering faith in the consensus model among municipal reformers was the growing popularity of proportional representation (PR). A system to ensure minority representation, PR gained support in reform circles during the second decade of the twentieth century. It came in various forms, though the most popular was the single transferable vote method (STV). In that system, voters cast a ballot with a ranked list of candidates for a multiseat office such as in an at-large election for a city council. Once a candidate had received sufficient votes, any further ballots cast for him (or her) would go to that voter's second choice. That process would continue, moving down the list of voter choices until all available offices were filled. The central goal of the process was to ensure that minority groups and parties received a proportional share of the offices.

The idea had circulated in the United States and Europe for the better part of a century. Thomas Hare, an English lawyer and author of the 1859 pamphlet "On the Election of Representatives, Parliamentary and Municipal," conceived of the STV method of proportional representation. Hare argued that unlike a

district-based system in which an elected official represented both supporters and opponents, his proposal would ensure that representatives acted on behalf of a "natural community of interest." Hare's concept imagined the body politic not as a collection of harmonious, geographically bounded communities but as a series of dispersed groups with distinctive desires and demands. Fervent advocates of the scheme included John Stuart Mill, who introduced a bill designed to remodel English elections on Hare's plan, and the American municipal reformer Simon Sterne. Despite Sterne's activism, the idea gained little traction in American civic improvement circles through the end of the nineteenth century, a period when the concept of a morally unified public remained strong.[57]

Support for proportional representation emerged gradually during the Progressive Era, as doubts about the possibility of civic unity intensified. Sterne continued his campaign on its behalf into the 1890s, emphasizing its utility as an antidote to the problems associated with machine politics in cities. Others joined in, forming the Proportional Representation League (PRL) in 1893. In 1912 the League decided to concentrate on municipal elections as the most inviting target for substantial reform. Two years later the National Municipal League adopted PR as a part of its model city charter. Ashtabula, Ohio, became the first city to adopt the program, and over the ensuing two decades two dozen cities joined suit, including Cleveland and Cincinnati during the 1920s and New York City in 1936.[58]

The inclusion of PR as an element of the National Municipal League's model charter reflects a growing incoherence in reform thought. The League presented it alongside nonpartisan, at-large elections as equally valid methods of reform. But the two choices arose from much different understandings of how the urban body politic was constituted. PR followed from the recognition that citizens were divided into groups and that the desires of minority interests, whether defined by economic, cultural, or other concerns, deserved representation and consideration. The point of nonpartisan at-large elections was to place representatives devoted to the city as a whole in office, thereby avoiding the kind of group- and locality-oriented policymaking promoted by decentralized partisan politics. The presence of both alternatives reflected the continuing unease among reformers: they recognized the problems with political structures designed for a morally unified electorate but still found it difficult to embrace political pluralism.[59]

This retreat would continue through the 1920s and 1930s, during which time a substantial number of cities adopted PR. Doing so constituted a tacit abandonment of the ideal of civic consensus. Leaders of Boston's Good Government Association acknowledged as much privately when the organization announced its support for proportional representation in 1923. Only in such a system would its candidates stand a chance of election. That admission—that the GGA spoke

for a minority rather than for the city as a whole—signified its recognition that the concept of reform undertaken on behalf of a united, morally cohesive community no longer worked. In cities where PR was adopted, such as Cincinnati and Cleveland, its proponents had a similar aim, to empower reformers unable to capture majority support.[60]

The rise of proportional representation did not supersede entirely the demand for reform based on consensus. Municipal activists continued to press for at-large city elections, more efficient governance, and measures such as commission government and the city manager system, which paid little heed to the necessity of a governing process that took into account competing ideas and interests. Outside the Northeast and Midwest, in cities that did most of their growing during the twentieth century and did not face the challenge of unseating party machines, civic elites found reform visions on behalf of the city as a whole more congenial and more workable. But the spread of PR after World War I into several of Ohio's industrial cities and other urban settings signaled a growing acknowledgment of the heterogeneity of the city.[61]

What was implicit in these municipal reform proposals—that there was no single public interest—others made explicit. The first to do so was Arthur Bentley, whose *Process of Government*, published in 1908, was the first major statement of modern pluralism. A political scientist by training and a big-city reporter by trade, Bentley argued forcefully that there was "no such thing as 'the social-whole.'" Whenever one group entered the political arena, there was "always another group facing it on the same plane." Notions of the public interest and the common good were abstract concepts used to disguise the self-interested pursuit of group advantage, he argued. Groups were all that mattered, according to Bentley, and he contended that any serious, realistic analysis of politics started with that premise. Bentley's argument, which received respectful though not effusive reviews from academics such as Charles Beard and Albion Small, did not penetrate into mainstream thinking immediately, but it eventually became an influential statement of pluralist philosophy.[62]

Pluralist theory eventually received an unexpected boost from prominent journalist Walter Lippmann. A protégé of Steffens, Lippmann had undergone an intellectual journey from an enthusiastic Progressive reformer to a skeptic about democracy. In essays for the *New Republic* and then in two longer works, *Public Opinion* (1922) and *The Phantom Public* (1925), he argued that the complexity of modern life generated a range of opinions and loyalties that negated ideals of reform on behalf of the public good. He called instead for an expert-led process of government that balanced competing interests and ensured efficiency. He joined Bentley in explicitly rejecting the idea that there was a coherent entity called "the public" and that its will could be divined. Interest groups often

depicted themselves as speaking for the public and serving the public good, Lippmann concluded, but they in fact represented particular agendas. It was essential that they be conceived as interests and made to "sail under [their] own colors."[63]

Eventually political scientists joined in this way of thinking. The field had arisen partly in support of municipal reform during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. By the end of that period its leaders sought a more detached, empirical basis for it. The University of Chicago's Charles Merriam, himself a former urban reformer and politician, spearheaded this effort, striving to place the study of politics on a more scientific footing. In doing so, he and his colleagues drew on the pluralist realism first articulated by Bentley and British scholar Harold Laski, as well as on the behaviorist theories of psychologist John Watson. The result was an approach to public life that a party boss would readily recognize. Politics, in the words of Merriam protégé Harold Lasswell, was about "who gets what, when, how."[64]

As the pluralist explanation of American democracy took hold, the stock of political machines rose. Bentley's book, rescued from obscurity by the rise of formal pluralist theory after World War I, was a harbinger of this trend. Though a trained political scientist, Bentley was ultimately a journalist whose understanding of how politics worked stemmed more from his up-close look at Chicago politics than from his studies of German theory. It was no coincidence that when describing the relationship between political parties and a pluralistic social context, Bentley turned first to Tammany as an example. He even cited approvingly Daniel Greenleaf Thompson's depiction of the New York machine's method as "government by syndicate." From Bentley's perspective, the machine represented one set of interests, reformers another. Richard Croker could not have put it better.[65]

Academic political scientists endorsed this appraisal of city politics during the 1920s. Machines served for them as the quintessential examples of the process of balancing group interests. Among Lasswell's first published papers was a study of Chicago's First Ward. Harold Gosnell, another colleague of Merriam's, would author the classic of this genre, *Machine Politics: Chicago Model*, in 1937. By the middle of the twentieth century, social scientists and historians armed with functionalist theory argued that machines had persisted despite the best efforts of reformers because they provided for the needs of the various interests that constituted urban society. That interpretation would prevail both in and out of the academy.[66]

By the end of the Progressive Era, Americans in the urban North had for the most part settled the question of how to reconcile democracy and urban society, at least for the time being. The consensual model of politics promoted by

Steffens and other reformers was largely spent. It would hang on, as a vocabulary of dissent in the cities of the industrialized section of the country and in more robust form in the business-dominated newer cities of the Southwest and West. The pluralist vision of city politics would continue to gain ground, fueled by the inadvertent boost it received when Progressives such as Steffens tried to bring to life an undifferentiated people. The effort to mobilize "the people" produced many peoples, each bent on realizing its own civic vision. Faced with this welter of activism, many reformers grew disillusioned, abandoning the ideal of the common good and leaving the field to machine politicians and other realists who approached public life as the art of brokering among competing interests and nothing more.

Lost in this dynamic were the ideas and practices espoused by advocates of deliberative democracy. The principles and institutions devised by Jane Addams, Edward Ward, Mary Follett, and a handful of others lost out, first to the reinvention of a united public by Lincoln Steffens and other reformers and then to the pragmatism—or cynicism—of those who looked at the multiplicity of interests at play in modern public life and embraced the mechanistic methods of party politicians. This vision of public life would prevail in cities after the Progressive Era and, eventually, in the more general conception of American politics that would develop through the middle decades of the twentieth century. Not until the 1960s would the matter-of-fact pluralism embodied by the machine face another substantial challenge, and once again it would prove more divisive than unifying.

EPILOGUE

The Last Hurrah and the Vindication of Machine Politics

Perhaps no account, scholarly or fictional, has done more to shape perceptions of urban politics in the industrial era than Edwin O'Connor's immensely popular 1956 novel *The Last Hurrah.* Lay readers, critics, and scholars have all assumed that O'Connor had written a thinly disguised depiction of Boston politics and saw the book's main character, aging Irish mayor Frank Skeffington, as James Michael Curley. Most agreed that the book offered an authentic glimpse of how machine politicians provided for the needs of immigrant, working-class voters in a personal, culturally sensitive manner. They also saw it as an endorsement of such methods. A movie version starring Spencer Tracy followed in 1958, cementing the image of the political boss as an engaging, kindhearted rogue and machines as necessary, effective tools for managing the public life of cities. The popular embrace of O'Connor's story, which overlooked its more subtle qualities, suggested that bossism had earned a degree of acceptance unimaginable in the days of Tweed.

The Last Hurrah's nostalgic plot centered on the observations of Skeffington's politically naive nephew Adam, who follows his uncle around an unnamed city during what would be his last campaign for mayor. In the process, he receives a behind-the-scenes view of a disappearing world of backroom deals, Irish wakes, and ethnic feuding. As the campaign unfolds, Skeffington battles a young, telegenic but vacuous opponent backed by a coalition of the elderly mayor's enemies. The story acknowledges Skeffington's corruption and hunger for power but dwells more explicitly on his generosity and frankness. The upstart wins, much to the bewilderment of the boss and his lieutenants, signaling the demise

of the clientelism that had supposedly defined urban politics for several generations. On election night the mayor suffers a heart attack as he returns home, and he dies shortly thereafter. In the novel's most famous scene a dying, apparently comatose Skeffington overhears one of his critics declare that the mayor would do things differently if he had the chance to start again. "The hell I would," he suddenly replies, just before passing on.[1]

Skeffington's epitaph underscored the humor, defiance, and pragmatic sense of morality that made him an attractive figure to so many readers. The initial reaction to the book focused on these traits. Marketing materials from his publisher, Little, Brown, and Co., described Skeffington as "half hero, half rascal," a depiction many reviewers echoed. *Time* characterized him as "a lovable rogue—a combination of Santa Claus, Robin Hood, a Chinese Warlord, and the late John Barrymore." The Book-of-the-Month Club, which made the novel one of its featured selections, noted Skeffington's corruptness but insisted it was "mitigated by a genuine benevolence toward his people and a perfect understanding of their problems."[2]

James Michael Curley saw the book in these terms as well, and used it to burnish his own reputation. After initially threatening to sue for libel, the former Boston mayor enthusiastically adopted Skeffington's story, reveling in the acclaim it generated. He produced an autobiography, *I'd Do It Again*, that probably owed more to O'Connor's fiction than to his actual life. Even the title was a reference to Skeffington's deathbed declaration that he had no regrets. O'Connor once wrote that he wanted to discuss his book with Curley but never did. He attributed this failure to the fact that they had both "become too preoccupied with our own activities: I with my book, he with my book."[3]

Curley's embrace of *The Last Hurrah* reinforced a tendency to treat the novel as a realistic portrait of city politics and thus a credible account of benevolent bossism. The book's reputation as a roman à clef, with Skeffington as Curley, his challenger as Boston mayor Maurice Tobin, and the Archbishop as Boston's William Cardinal O'Connell, fueled these assumptions. Clifton Fadiman, in the *Book-of-the-Month Club News*, labeled Skeffington a representative "type." Howard Mumford Jones argued in the *Saturday Review* that "no American novel throws into clearer light the operations of the personal machines built up by these political geniuses"; it showed the failure of the "Old Americans" to recognize that "politics is built upon personalized and family relationships." It was a book, he added, "for anyone who wanted to know how American politics really operated." The *Christian Science Monitor* pronounced the book a "genuine portrait" not only of the boss but of the "Irish-American community." *Commonweal* reviewer Joe Dever claimed the book was of "major significance as a sociological novel of the big city in America."[4]

Many scholars reached the same conclusion. A 1957 review in the *Midwest Journal of Political Science* treated the novel as light fiction and had only mild complaints about the accuracy of its depiction of urban political life. Subsequent academic comment confirmed that judgment, almost routinely citing the book as a source of "authentic and fascinating detail about 'inside politics.'" As recently as 1992, one political scientist praised O'Connor for recognizing "that politics is inextricably bound up with the personal needs, yearnings, and fantasies of its participants." A "Last Hurrah thesis" developed as well, alluding to an explanation of Skeffington's defeat offered by a character in the book: the usurpation of the social welfare functions of the machine by the New Deal.[5]

To a considerable extent, both scholars and critics misread O'Connor's subtle novel. *The Last Hurrah* was not simply a celebration of the benevolence of bosses and machines. O'Connor intimate Arthur Schlesinger Jr. insisted, quite properly, that those who see the book as a romanticized defense of old-style politics have "misconstrued" it. While Skeffington was and is an attractive and immensely entertaining figure, O'Connor sought to create a character that was more complex than the stereotypes about affable, pragmatic scofflaws. The book presented Skeffington's rougher edges, hinted at his cynicism, and alluded to his corruption, all as part of its sly critique of Irish American life at midcentury. As biographer Hugh Rank has argued, "the extent of O'Connor's achievement has been concealed, ironically, by his own subtlety in craftsmanship and by his complexity of vision."[6]

Most readers overlooked these complexities and deemed *The Last Hurrah* realistic because they viewed it in the context of mid-twentieth-century social trends. O'Connor's supposedly sentimental portrayal of the disappearing world of machine politics helped defang the Tammany-Tiger image of big-city, immigrant-dominated public life at just the moment when second-generation European ethnics were entering the suburban middle class. The story made it possible to celebrate the political tradition of their parents as benevolent—and thus morally valid—where it had once been seen as a corrupt and anti-democratic force. The book's nostalgic tone and the emphasis on the decline of machine politics made its subject less threatening, even a source of amusement. *The Last Hurrah's* apparent fit with recent scholarship on urban politics also helps explain why so many failed to grasp its critique of the boss. O'Connor's frequent emphasis on the personal aspect of Skeffington's political method conformed to the functionalist interpretation of the machine proposed by Robert Merton and popularized by scholars such as Oscar Handlin and Richard Hofstadter. Writing in 1947, sociologist Merton argued that certain institutions and practices persisted, even if they did not conform to prevailing norms, because they performed latent—or hidden—functions. He hypothesized that political machines were a

case in point. They endured despite their evident corruption because they centralized power in fragmented urban polities, provided necessary social services to the poor, and offered an avenue for social mobility. Merton's discussion of the provision of social services for needy immigrants—a job, a turkey at Christmas, bail money—in a humane, personal manner that differed sharply from the cold, impersonal style of the reformer drew the most attention. A number of historians adopted this illustration of functionalist theory as a settled fact instead of a proposition to be tested, most notably Oscar Handlin, who reproduced Merton's explanation of the success of boss politics in *The Uprooted*, his Pulitzer Prize–winning study of the immigrant experience. Published in 1951, Handlin's work in turn shaped Richard Hofstadter's 1956 portrayal of modern American politics, *The Age of Reform*, also a Pulitzer winner. O'Connor's account of the rise and fall of Frank Skeffington clearly drew on these ideas and seemed all the more credible for being in step with recent research.[7]

Historians and political scientists latched onto Merton's proposition (and O'Connor's novel) about machines because it fit well with pluralist theory. By the 1950s the idea first broached by bosses and expressed more formally by observers such as Arthur Bentley and Walter Lippmann—that politics in the United States was a competition among a plethora of interests—prevailed in academic circles. This competition was roughly equal and worked best when politicians sought to provide for the concrete needs and interests of their supporters, which were balanced out in the give-and-take of democratic politics. It worked less successfully when a group attempted to impose its values without compromise. Ideological reformers best exemplified this sort of moralistic—some called it irrational—political activism. Machine politicians exemplified the pluralist approach by providing services without demanding conformity, a style copied by Franklin Roosevelt, according to Richard Hofstadter and other scholars. The thrust of this explanation flowed from the ideological exigencies of the Cold War, as Terrence McDonald has persuasively argued. It provided an American political tradition defined by the hardheaded pragmatism of urban bosses and pragmatic New Dealers that was distinct from the irrational, ideological character of communism on the left and fascism on the right.[8]

In this manner the ascendance of pluralist theory after World War II completed the ethical rehabilitation of machine politics launched by urban bosses. It helped uncouple the boss from the moral baggage he had carried since the nineteenth century. Linked to ignorant, corruptible immigrants, machine politics had long been viewed as morally suspect. From the late nineteenth century forward, urban party politicians had worked assiduously to redefine themselves as respectable men managing the chaos and contention of urban life. Citing these self-justifications, as well as the work of sympathetic journalists and reformers,

uncritically, Merton, Handlin, Hofstadter, and the scholars who followed their lead recast the defensive rhetoric of urban bosses as social scientific evidence and accepted the claim that they were pragmatic, effective managers of the modern industrial city. Political scientist Eric McCittrick captured this shift in a comment on the success of O'Connor's novel. Its popularity reflected the development of a more relaxed attitude toward political machines, he noted, and the recognition that they performed "certain stabilizing functions." When Richard Croker made just that point during the 1890s, elite opinion was outraged; by the middle of the twentieth century the same argument carried academic credentials.[9]

The scholarly redefinition of the machine had implications beyond the realm of city politics. The pluralist scholars who pointed to boss politics as an example of pragmatic, humane leadership in a heterogeneous social context did not do so out of a special concern for urban public life. Rather, they employed them as illustrations of a fundamental formula for the conduct of American democracy that was ascendant at midcentury. All politics, they implied, ought to function in this pragmatic, pluralistic fashion. It was no coincidence that in *Who Governs?* (1961), perhaps the quintessential statement of mid-twentieth-century pluralist theory, Robert Dahl selected an industrial city—New Haven, Connecticut—to illustrate the workings of political pluralism. It was in urban settings that Americans appeared to have worked out most fully the problem of making democracy work in a heterogeneous society.

But as Dahl recognized, interest group pluralism fell short of a fully inclusive, equitable democracy. Certainly that was the case for the brand of politics practiced by machine politicians. Even in their heyday, urban political bosses were loath to share scarce patronage plums and other resources with outsiders, including the millions of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe flooding into cities before World War I. Only when those groups matured politically and made themselves an electoral force did machines accommodate them, a process that often took two generations. Workers did not uniformly benefit from the largesse of bosses either. The claim that machines served as bulwarks against class politics was more than talk. By mobilizing voters on the basis of neighborhood and ethnicity and by responding to the particular demands of trade unions but not the broader concerns of workingmen's parties, urban bosses restricted the political options of the poor and removed from public debate a specific set of ideas and policies that might have benefited them.

Perhaps the greatest failure of machine-style pluralism came after World War II, when millions of African Americans moved to northern cities. In Chicago, Mayor Richard Daley's famed Cook County Democratic organization (the last of the big-city machines) proved unable or unwilling to help these newcomers, who faced a degree of discrimination and segregation not experienced by

European immigrants. For a time, a few blacks followed the lead of Congressman William Dawson and carved out a place for themselves as junior partners in the machine's coalition. But as their numbers increased and as racial tensions over housing and employment intensified, Daley and his organization refused to risk alienating racist supporters by confronting these issues directly. Blacks were expected to bide their time and accept the machine's patronage, as when Daley famously offered the ambitious young civil rights activist Jesse Jackson a position as a toll booth operator. The remnants of party machines in other northern cities treated African Americans in much the same way.[10]

The inability of blacks to earn a place as equal partners in the partisan coalitions of big cities highlights the fundamental limitation of the industrial era's urban pluralism. Though bosses claimed to help the least powerful by responding to their needs and giving voice to their demands, in practice they served the interests of the best-organized, best-connected groups. African Americans suffered in particular, as Diane Pinderhughes has argued, because urban race relations were simply too contentious to permit the kind of bargaining among interests that characterized pluralistic machine politics.[11] In a few instances—the sincere efforts of Tammanyites Al Smith and Robert Wagner to improve factory safety laws after the Triangle Factory fire come to mind—machine politicians acted in the interests of the least powerful. But their principal concerns were winning elections and preserving the status quo, not the pursuit of justice, equity, or the common good.

It is worth remembering that some reformers had imagined fairer, more inclusive alternatives during the Progressive Era. While good-government types sought efficiency rather than democracy, reformers such as Edward Ward and Mary Parker Follett proposed deliberative institutions that embraced social differences. They conceived of a civic life rooted in an ethic of reciprocity—a respect for divergent interests and points of view—and designed processes by which all citizens had an opportunity to make their desires and opinions known and have them taken seriously. Ironically, this sophisticated conception of democracy was overwhelmed by a naive faith in a unified public that made calls for inclusion and deliberation seem unnecessary. When that ideal proved unworkable, Americans settled for a broker-style pluralism that left many cut off from the corridors of power.

If the results of American efforts to reconcile democracy and diversity in the city are not entirely a point of pride, neither should they be a source of shame. In the modern world, nearly every democratic country has wrestled with this challenge to some degree, and few, if any, have improved dramatically on the pragmatic pluralism that emerged in American cities during the industrial era. Perhaps more important, in their less self-congratulatory moments Americans

have not been entirely satisfied with this approach. The persistent criticism of the "special interests" and the low regard most hold for politicians testifies to an enduring desire for a politics defined by something more than bartering, for a public life built on the ideal of the common good. If this yearning—this "democratic wish"—too often leads to simplistic notions of how politics can operate, it also demonstrates a durable commitment to fostering a more inclusive, equitable civic realm.

Notes

PREFACE

1. James Madison et al., *The Federalist Papers* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 124; Douglass Adair, "The Tenth Federalist Revisited," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 3rd ser., 8 (January 1951): 48–67. See also Daniel Rodgers, *Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics since Independence* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 185–186, and Paul F. Bourke, "The Pluralist Reading of James Madison's Tenth Federalist," *Perspectives in American History* 9 (1975): 271–295 (esp. 292–293).

2. Important studies locating the rise of interest group pluralism in the late nineteenth century include Philip J. Ethington, *The Public City: The Political Construction of Urban Life in San Francisco, 1850–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), and Elisabeth S. Clemens, *The People's Lobby: Organizational Innovation and the Rise of Interest Group Politics in the United States, 1890–1925* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

3. Rodgers, *Contested Truths,* 186.

4. See, for instance, Mary Ryan's powerful and insightful account of how the unruly, exuberant mixing that characterized antebellum urban public life gave way to closed-door decision making by the Gilded Age. It is also worth noting that the boisterous, occasionally violent political conflict that occurred in cities before the Civil War suggested that more formal political institutions and practices had not developed sufficiently to accommodate heterogeneity. Mary C. Ryan, *Civil Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

5. Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005). William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) and *Pluralism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005). For a discussion of these issues, see James T. Kloppenberg, *The Virtues of Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), especially 71–81, 100–123. There is an enormous theoretical literature on democracy and pluralism. Jürgen Habermas provides a useful grounding in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989). See also Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992). On deliberative democracy, see James Bohman and William Rehg, eds., *Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), and Amy Gutmann, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

6. Amy Bridges, *Morning Glories: Municipal Reform in the Southwest* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999); Robert Fairbanks, *For the City as a Whole: Planning, Politics, and the Public Interest in Dallas, Texas, 1900–1965* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1998); and Martin Shefter, *Political Parties and the State: The American Historical Experience* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 169–194.

INTRODUCTION

1. Tom Robinson, "Paddy's Fight with the Know Nothings" (New York: Andrews Printer, n.d.).

2. Howard P. Chudacoff and Judith E. Smith, *The Evolution of American Urban Society,* 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1994), 55.

3. Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 109–110; Chudacoff and Smith, *Evolution of American Urban Society,* 74; David A. Gerber, *The Making of American Pluralism: Buffalo, New York, 1825–1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

4. Charles Nelson Glaab and A. Theodore Brown, *A History of Urban America* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 84; Tyler Anbinder, *Five Points: The 19th-Century New York City Neighborhood That Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections, and Became the World's Most Notorious Slum* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 14–37, 46–47, 154–166; Harry C. Silcox, *Philadelphia Politics from the Bottom Up: The Life of Irishman William McMullen, 1824–1901* (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, 1989), 21–22, 27–29; Amy Bridges, *A City in the Republic: Antebellum New York and the Origins of Machine Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 193. Mid-nineteenth-century Americans used the term "racial" to distinguish not only between blacks and whites but also between different European ethnic groups. It is that sense that I employ here.

5. Edgar Allen Poe, "The Man of the Crowd," in *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1912), 102; Edwin Hubbell Chapin, *Humanity in the City* (New York: De Witt and Davenport, 1854), 17; Walt Whitman, Preface to *Leaves of Grass,* in *The Portable Walt Whitman,* rev. ed., ed. Mark Van Doren (New York: Viking Press, 1945), 5; George Templeton Strong diary, June 19, 1852, cited in Glaab and Brown, *History of Urban America,* 103.

6. Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780–1840* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); Joel Silbey, *American Political Nation, 1838–1893* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991), 43, 44; William E. Gienapp, "Politics Seemed to Enter into Everything: Political Culture in the North, 1840–1860," in *Essays on Antebellum American Politics, 1840–1860,* ed. Stephen E. Maizlish and John J. Kushma (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1982), 15–69; William G. Shade, "Political Pluralism and Party Development: The Creation of a Modern Party System, 1815–1862," in *Evolution of American Electoral Systems,* by Paul Kleppner et al. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), 77–111.

7. Silbey, *American Political Nation,* 36; Gerald Leonard, *The Invention of Party Politics: Federalism, Popular Sovereignty, and Constitutional Development in Jacksonian Illinois* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 5. See also Edward L. Mayo, "Republicanism, Antipartyism, and Jacksonian Party Politics: A View from the Nation's Capital," *American Quarterly* 31 (Spring 1979): 3–19; Ronald P. Formisano, "Political Character, Antipartyism, and the Second Party System," *American Quarterly* 21 (Winter 1969): 683–709; David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 203–207.

8. On the Whigs, see Michael Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), and William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852–1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). On Democratic ideology, see Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of State: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), and Leonard, *Invention of Party Politics,* 5–7.

9. The literature on republicanism is extensive. A good summary is Daniel T. Rodgers, "Republicanism: The Career of a Concept," *Journal of American History* 79 (June 1992): 11–38.

10. Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and the New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1890s* (New York: New York University Press); Appleby, "Commercial Farming and the

'Agrarian Myth' in the Early Republic," *Journal of American History* 68 (1982): 833–849; Appleby, "Republicanism in Old and New Contexts," *William and Mary Quarterly* 43 (January 1986): 3–34.

11. James Kloppenberg, "The Virtues of Liberalism: Christianity, Republicanism, and Ethics in Early American Political Discourse," *Journal of American History* 74, no. 1 (1987): 9–33; Woody Holton, "Divide et Impera: *Federalist 10* in a Wider Sphere," *William and Mary Quarterly* 62 (April 2005): 175–212. See also Andrew Shankman, *Crucible of American Democracy: The Struggle to Fuse Egalitarianism and Capitalism in Jeffersonian Pennsylvania* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

12. Ronald Formisano, "The Party Period Revisited," *Journal of American History* 86 (June 1999): 93.

13. Bridges, *City in the Republic,* 73–74; Sam Bass Warner, *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth,* 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 91–98.

14. Anbinder, *Five Points,* 141–142, 148–149; Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 635.

15. Silcox, *Philadelphia Politics,* 36; Michael F. Holt, *Forging a Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848–1860* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1969), 111. Thomas H. O'Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997), 95–127.

16. Wilentz, *Chants Democratic,* 327–335; Bridges, *City in the Republic,* 123–124.

17. Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham,* 516, 553–554; Bruce Laurie, *Artisans into Workers: Labor in Nineteenth-Century America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 54; David Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1999), 50–54; *Champion of Labor,* April 8, 1847, p. 2, cited in Bridges, *City in the Republic,* 95.

18. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle,* October, 11, 1849, p. 3; October 16, 1849, p. 3; July 23, 1864, p. 2; July 27, 1864, p. 2; August 3, 1864, p. 2.

19. Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789–1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 61–62; J. Frank Kernan, *Reminiscences of the Old Fire Laddies* (New York, 1885), 48–50, quoted in Anbinder, *Five Points,* 150.

20. Glenna Matthews, *The Rise of Public Woman: Women's Power and Women's Place in the United States, 1630–1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Mary C. Ryan, *The Mysteries of Sex: Tracing Women and Men through American History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 149–162.

21. Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 71–102.

22. Silcox, *Philadelphia Politics,* 65–66.

23. Silcox, *Philadelphia Politics,* 77–82.

24. Dennis Clark, The *Irish in Philadelphia: Ten Generations of Urban Experience* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1973), 178–179; Silcox, *Philadelphia Politics,* 54.

25. Jerome Mushkat, *Fernando Wood: A Political Biography* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1990), 1–7.

26. Mushkat, *Fernando Wood,* 3–7, 24–25.

27. Mushkat, *Fernando Wood,* 7–13.

28. Mushkat, *Fernando Wood,* 4, 13, 18, 34; Bridges, *City in the Republic,* 147.

29. E. Hutchinson, *A Model Mayor: Early Life, Congressional Career, and Triumphant Municipal Administration of Hon. Fernando Wood, Mayor of the City of New York: Presenting His Public Speeches and Messages, and the Principles on Which His Government Is Founded; By a Citizen of New York* (New York: American Family Publication Establishment,

1855), 21; Mushkat, *Fernando Wood,* 77; Bridges, *City in the Republic,* 117–120 (quotation on 118).

30. "Song for Mayor Wood" (New York: Horace Waters, 1855).

31. This and the following four paragraphs are drawn from Xavier Donald MacLeod, *Biography of the Honorable Fernando Wood, Mayor of New York* (New York: O. F. Parsons, 1856), 288–296.

32. MacLeod, *Fernando Wood,* 13–14.

33. MacLeod, *Fernando Wood,* 14–15.

34. MacLeod, *Fernando Wood,* 15, 156.

35. *New York Times,* November 29, 1859, p. 1.

36. Hutchinson, *Model Mayor,* 57.

37. *New York Times,* November 29, 1859, p. 4. The appeal of promises of order would grow stronger after the Civil War, as fears of class conflict intensified.

38. Hutchinson, *Model Mayor,* 15; MacLeod, *Fernando Wood,* 288–289.

39. Hutchinson, *Model Mayor,* 22; *New York Times,* May 5, 1857; Mushkat, *Fernando Wood,* 72.

40. Gerber, *Making of American Pluralism,* 381.

41. Andrew R. L. Cayton, "The Fragmenting of 'a Great Family': The Panic of 1819 and the Rise of a Middling Interest in Boston, 1818–1822," *Journal of the Early Republic* 2 (Summer 1982): 163; Matthew H. Crocker, *The Magic of the Many: Josiah Quincy and the Rise of Mass Politics in Boston, 1800–1830* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 64–65; Evelyn Savidge Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles: Ethnic Politics and the Catholic Church in Providence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 15–16; Peter McCaffery, *When Bosses Ruled Philadelphia: The Emergence of the Republican Machine, 1867–1933* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 8; Philip J. Ethington, *The Public City: The Political Construction of Urban Life in San Francisco, 1850–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 161–167.

42. Council No. 12, *Principles and Objects of the American Party* (New York, 1855), cited in Mark Voss Hubbard, *Beyond Party: Cultures of Antipartisanship in Northern Politics before the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 131.

43. Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 192), 20–24.

44. Bridges, *City in the Republic,* 97; "A Few Considerations for Reflecting Voters," in *The American Party Battle: Election Campaign Pamphlets, 1828–1876,* ed. Joel Silbey, vol. 2, *1854–1876* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 57, 59.

45. Bridges, *City in the Republic,* 34–35, 144; Gerber, *Making of American Pluralism,* 392.

46. *New York Times,* September 20, 1852, p. 1; *New York Tribune,* March 7, 1853; Independent reformers quoted in Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 161; Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham,* 831.

47. Cooper quoted in Bridges, *City in the Republic,* 137; *New York Tribune,* March 5, 1853.

48. *New York Tribune,* March 5, 1853; Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham,* 829–835.

49. *New York Tribune,* March 7, March 5, 1853.

50. Joel H. Silbey, *Respectable Minority: The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era, 1860–1868* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978); Jean Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998). On the influence of antipartisanship, see Adam I. P. Smith, *No Party Now: Politics in the Civil War North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), and Mark E. Neely, *The Union Divided: Party Conflict in the Civil War North* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 173–189.

51. Smith, *No Party Now,* 78; Edward K. Spann, *Gotham at War: New York City, 1860–1865* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 2002), 14.

52. Smith, *No Party Now,* 36; John Campbell, *Unionists versus Traitors: The Political Parties of Philadelphia; or the Nominees That Ought to Be Elected in 1861* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1861); Spann, *Gotham at War,* 14.

53. Smith, *No Party Now,* 73–84 (quotation on 80).

54. Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 17.

CHAPTER 1. EXPLAINING TWEED

1. Alexander B. Callow, *The Tweed Ring* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966); Kenneth D. Ackerman, *Boss Tweed: The Rise and Fall of the Corrupt Pol Who Conceived the Soul of Modern New York* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2000). Some sources incorrectly list Tweed's middle name as "Marcy," a name assigned by the press in apparent reference to former New York governor and senator William Marcy, whose enthusiasm for patronage reportedly led him to declare that "to the victor belongs the spoils." See Ackerman, *Boss Tweed,* 371, n.1.

2. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper,* December 30, 1871, p. 242.

3. Callow, *Tweed Ring,* 33–47.

4. Seymour J. Mandelbaum, *Boss Tweed's New York* (New York: J. Wiley, 1965), 87.

5. Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 199–200. Alfred Dupont Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 92–94.

6. Callow, *Tweed Ring,* 200, 248–252; Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1003–1008.

7. Callow, *Tweed Ring,* 279–298.

8. *New York Times,* November 10, 1866; *Chicago Tribune,* December 18, 1866.

9. "Municipal Responsibility," *Nation,* November 23, 1871, p. 333.

10. Henry Adams, "American Finance, 1865–1869," *Edinburgh Review* 129 (April 1869), quoted in Kevin Pierce Thornton, "The End of Virtue: Public Morality and Individual Autonomy in America, 1865–1880" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1996), 51.

11. *New York Times,* July 24, 1871; July 3, 1871.

12. *New York Times,* July 10, 11, 20, 1871.

13. *New York Times* July 8, 28, 27, and November 8, 1871.

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CHAPTER 2. INVENTING THE MACHINE

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CHAPTER 3. LABOR'S REPUBLIC LOST

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41. George, "Money in Elections," 206; Henry George Election Day Leaflet, Henry George Scrapbooks, vol. 28; *Knights of Labor,* March 26, 1887, p. 7, and April 2, 1887, n.p.

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43. *Swinton's,* October 24, 1886; Post and Leubescher, *Henry George's 1886 Campaign,* 21.

44. Scobey, "Boycotting the Politics Factory," 307–309; Henry George quote in Post and Leubescher, *Henry George's 1886 Campaign,* 9.

45. Post and Leubescher, *Henry George's 1886 Campaign,* 5; Scobey, "Boycotting the Politics Factory," 291.

46. Post and Leubescher, *Henry George's 1886 Campaign,* 107, 109, 17.

47. *Swinton's,* November 7, 1886, p. 1; *Knights of Labor,* September 25, 1886, p. 3.

48. *Cincinnati Enquirer,* December 20, 1886, p. 2, and January 17, 1887, p. 8.

49. *Chicago Tribune,* March 18, 1897; *Knights of Labor,* March 5, 1887; unidentified clipping, Henry George Scrapbooks, vol. 19; Post and Leubescher, *Henry George's 1886 Campaign,* 33–34.

50. Unidentified clipping, n.d., Henry George Scrapbooks, vol. 19; *Chicago Tribune,* October 2, 1886; Post and Leubescher, *Henry George's 1886 Campaign,* 34, 96; Ross, *Workers on the Edge,* 311–312.

51. *Harper's Weekly,* October 23, 1886, p. 692.

52. Post and Leubescher, *Henry George's 1886 Campaign,* 48, 111; Henry George to Mrs. Lowell, October 19, 1886, in Henry George Papers, series I: Correspondence, 1854–1939, microfilm reel 5.

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54. Julie Greene, *The American Federation of Labor and Political Activism, 1871–1917* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). On Chicago, see Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics,* 329–364. See also Shelton Stromquist, "The Crisis of 1894 and the Legacies of Producerism," in *The Pullman Strike and the Crisis of the 1890s,* ed. Richard Schneirov (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 179–203.

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CHAPTER 4. THE FEMININE CHALLENGE

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5. Elizabeth Belanger, "The Neighborhood Ideal: Local Planning Practices in Progressive-Era Women's Clubs," *Journal of Planning History* 8 (May 2009): 87–110; Daphne Spain, *How Women Saved the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Robin Bachin, *Building the South Side: Urban Space and Civil Culture in Chicago, 1890–1919* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 152.

6. Jo Freeman, "One Man, One Vote, One Woman, One Throat," *American Nineteenth-Century History* 1 (Autumn 2001): 103–104, 107, 109; Sara Monoson, "'Lady and the Tiger': Women's Electoral Activism in New York City before Suffrage," *Journal of Women's History* 2 (Fall 1990): 124.

7. Drew Vandecreek, "Unseen Influence: Lucretia Blankenburg and the Rise of Philadelphia Reform Politics in 1911," in *We Have Come to Stay: American Women and Political Parties, 1880–1960,* ed. Melanie Gustafson, Kristie Miller, and Elisabeth I. Perry (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 37–39; Peter McCaffery, *When Bosses Ruled Philadelphia: The Emergence of the Republican Machine, 1867–1933* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 181.

8. On Parkhurst, see Charles Henry Parkhurst, *Our Fight with Tammany* (1895; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1970), and Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A*

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9. Monoson, "Lady and the Tiger," 107, 119.

10. *New York Times*, November 9, 1894, p. 9; October 11, 1894, p. 9.

11. Rebecca Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery: Gender and American Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 118; Monoson, "Lady and the Tiger," 110–113.

12. For details of the Committee's efforts, see the entries for October and November 1905 in the Executive Committee Minute Book, Women's Committee for the City Party, October 18, 1905–February 3, 1907 folder, Anna Blanchard Blakiston Day Papers, 1905–1961, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. For similar attempts, see the entries for October through December 1906.

13. Vandecreek, "Unseen Influence," 39; *Philadelphia Evening Times*, October 13, 1913, clipping and *Philadelphia Ledger*, October 31, 1913, clipping in Women's League of Good Government Scrapbook, Anna Blanchard Blakiston Day Papers.

14. Monoson, "Lady and the Tiger," 115, 116.

15. Joan Waugh, *Unsentimental Reformer: The Life of Josephine Shaw Lowell* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 229; William Rhinelander Stewart, *The Philanthropic Work of Josephine Shaw Lowell, Containing a Biographical Sketch of Her Life, Together with a Selection of Her Public Papers and Private Letters* (New York: Macmillan, 1911), 420.

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18. Stewart, *Philanthropic Work of Josephine Shaw Lowell*, 445; Monoson, "Lady and the Tiger," 100.

19. Oswald Garrison Villard, *Women in the New York Municipal Campaign of 1901* (Boston, Mass.: J. Youngjohn, 1902), 1–2.

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22. Baker, "Domestication of Politics," 640–642; Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion*.

23. Flanagan, *Seeing with Their Hearts*, especially 46–51.

24. Flanagan, *Seeing with Their Hearts*, 31–32 (Brown quoted on 32); *Annals of the Chicago Women's Club for the First Forty Years of Its Organization, 1876–1916*, comp. Henriette Greenbaum Frank and Amalie Hofer Jerome (Chicago: Chicago Women's Club, 1916), 11, 16, 17.

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35. Woman's City Club of Chicago, *Woman's City Club Year Book* (Chicago: Woman's City Club of Chicago, 1910–11), 2; Woman's City Club of Chicago, *Woman's City Club: Its Book* (Chicago: Woman's City Club of Chicago, 1915), 31; *Woman's City Club Bulletin* 3 (July 1914): 6.

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Records, 1876–1998, Chicago History Museum, Chicago; *Annals of the Chicago Women's Club,* 39, 43–44.

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CHAPTER 5. IN DEFENSE OF PROFESSIONAL POLITICS

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12. "Mr. Croker on Politics and Spoils," *Outlook,* April 22, 1899, p. 900; Davis, "Tammany Hall," 61.

13. William L. Riordon, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall: A Series of Very Plain Talks on Very Practical Politics,* ed. Terrence J. McDonald (1905; reprint, Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1994), 52–53, 58.

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57. "Paul Leicester Ford," in *Gale Online Encyclopedia* (Detroit: Gale, 2008), http://go.galegroup.com/ps/start.do?p=LitRC&u=munc80314 (accessed March 28, 2008). Ford's apparent allusion to the monetary politics of the 1890s in his choice of Stirling as the name for the lead character and D'Alloi for his foil suggests his political sympathies.

58. Paul Leicester Ford, *The Honorable Peter Stirling and What People Thought of Him* (1894; reprint, Ridgewood, N.J.: Gregg Press, 1968), 225, 227, 110, 375.

59. Ford, *Honorable Peter Stirling,* 45, 157–158, 280.

60. Ford, *Honorable Peter Stirling,* 281.

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44. Follett, *New State,* 39. The unwieldy character of the positive words is suggestive of the difficulty Follett faced in promoting a civic method that did not conform to the prevailing understanding of how society worked.

45. Follett, *New State,* 40.
46. Tonn, *Mary P. Follett,* 273–274.
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48. Follett, *New State,* 245–246, 5.
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CHAPTER 7. THE PROBLEM WITH THE PUBLIC

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Index

Adams, Henry, 33, 57, 62
Addams, Jane: and deliberative democracy, 167, 169–177; and gender assumptions, 115–117, 133–134, 172, 176; journalism and commentary on, 174–175; legacy of, xiii; and militarism, 134; and Powers (ward boss), 115, 154–155, 171, 173–174, 177; and Pragmatism, 171–172; and Pullman strike, 168, 171, 172–173; and woman suffrage, 133–134, 176
African Americans, and failure of machine-style pluralism, 221–222
American ("Know Nothing") Party, 1–2, 14, 21–22, 24. *See also* nativism
The American Commonwealth (Bryce), 78–80
American Federation of Labor (AFL), 111, 112, 113
anarchists, 90–91, 108–109, *110*, 111, 112, 157–158, 161, 165
antipartyism, 5–6, 20–22, 25–27
at-large vs. district-based council elections, 195, 196, 198, 199, 211–212, 213, 214

Baker, Ray Stannard, 174, 203
Beard, Charles, 212, 214
Beckert, Sven, 50
Bentley, Arthur, 184, 214, 215, 220
Blake, Euphemia Vale, 144, 147
Blankenburg, Lucretia, 119, 121–123
Blankenburg, Rudoph, 119
The Boss (Lewis), 161, 162–163
bosses: class conflict and, 14, 16, 31–32; development of, 8–9, 11–12; immigration and, 16; masculinity and, 10–12, 16, 17, 37, 201; pluralism and, 12, 17; social order and, 16–17, 18–19, 228n37; supplicants lining up to petition, 15–16; as term, 9, 67; and women, paternalism toward, 17; Fernando Wood as, 7, 12–20. *See also* machine metaphor; machine politics; party politics
bosses, representations of: and machine metaphor, *55*, 66, 67; masculinity and, 16; and photographs, authority of, 146–147; race and class and, 39, 70–73, *71–72*, 150; Tweed Ring, *29*, 30, 32, 36–40, *38–39*, 70, 73
Boston: bosses of, 8; neighborhoods of, 4; population of, 3, 4
Boston-1915 campaign, 207, 208–211
Bridges, Amy, 8–9
Brooklyn: population of, 3
Bryce, James, 65, 67, 68, 69, 78–80, 81

capitalism: pluralism fostered by, x
Central Labor Union (CLU), 91–93, 101, 107, 236n28
Chicago: city charter rewrite, 211; industrialization of, 89; overview, xiii; population of, 3
Chicago Women's Club, 125, 129, 130–131, 132
Citizens Association (Chicago), 99
Citizens' Union, 119, 120
City Club (New York), 193, 194, 199
City Reform League (New York), 23–24
Civic Federation of Chicago, 113, 165–166, 168, 172, 195, 211
civic virtue: lack of, 7; municipal reformers and, 23, 24; rejection of, heterogeneity and, 18–19; and republicanism, ix, 6; and suffrage restriction, 51–52
Civil Rights (pamphlet), 40–42
Civil War, and the singular public, 25–27, 36
class: anti-Tweed campaign and, 34, 41–42; bosses and, 14, 16, 19–20, 31–32; identity and, 4–5; Know Nothings and, 21–22; liberal reformers and, 83–85; liberal reformers and attempts at cooperation across, 192–200; machine metaphor and, 56, 60, 65–66, 73, 75–77, 79, 80–81, 82–86; machine politics and, 139, 140–142, 143–147, 153–156, 160–161, 162–163, 221; masculinity and representations of, 37; municipal reform and, 43; of municipal reformers, 24; Nast and fears of conflict, 37; overview, 1–3; prevention of conflict, as defense of machine politics, 18; social center movement and, 180, 181, 187–188; and suffrage restriction, 43, 46–47, 51, 52; Tilden Commission and formation of, 50; and upper-class leadership, 8; women's club activism and cooperation across, 117, 120–123, 128–133, 168, 170–171, 238n4. *See also* labor movement

Cleveland, Grover, 57, 145, 159, 162
clubs, women's. *See* women's activism
Cohen, Nancy, 57
Cole, George, 195, 199
Committee of Seventy (New York), 35, 37, 42, 48
common good: antipartyism and, 5–6, 7–8, 20; bosses and rhetoric of, 20; enduring desire for ideal of, ix, x, 223; framework of republicanism and, 7; of liberalism, as competition and self-interest, 19; pluralism as inadvertent result of pursuing, 191, 205–211, 216; pluralist expressions of fealty to, 7–8; Steffens and pursuit of, 189, 191, 208. *See also* public, singular; republicanism
community centers, 186
Conkling, Roscoe, 63, 64, 68
Connolly, Richard, 30, 33, 37, 39
Connolly, William, xi
consensus, civic. *See* public, singular
consensus, moral. *See* moral consensus
cooperative movement, 100–101, 111
corruption: republicanism's definition of, 33; of Tweed Ring, 28, 30, 31–32, 33–35
Coughlin, John, 196
Cox, George, 138, 144, 145, 149, 151, 152, 156
Croker, Richard: appearance of, 70, *72*, *136*, 147, 150; biographies of, 84, 145, 148–149, 149–151; defending Tammany, 135–138, 147, 148, 151, 221; on immigrants, 157; masculinity and, 148–151; notoriety of, xii; politics as business, 139, 142; as self-made man, 141, 145, 146
Curley, James Michael, 128, 138, 143, 145, 146, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 183, 217, 218
Curtis, George William, 57, 65, 78
Czitrom, Daniel, 153

Dahl, Robert, 221
Debs, Eugene, 113, 189
deliberative democracy: defined, xi; ethic of reciprocity and, 222; heterogeneity and, 175; imperfections in pursuit of, 167, 174–175, 176–177, 179–180, 186–187; as lost, 216; and Pragmatism, 167–168, 171–172; as Progressivist trend, 166–169, 177, 188; Steffens' disregard for, 202, 209–210, 249n30; women's activism and development of, 118, 128–133, 168, 169–177. *See also* social center movement
democracy: defined, xi; as elusive, xii; interest group pluralism falling short of, 221–223; reciprocity and, xi, 222; United States as beacon of, x. *See also* deliberative democracy
Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties (Ostrogorski), 80–82
Democratic Party: antipartyism and, 5–6; Civil War and, 25–26; Locofoco wing, 13; and pluralism, development of, 5; and suffrage restriction, 52; Tammany Hall split from, 13; women's roles and, 11
"democratic wish," ix, 223. *See also* public, singular
Deutsch, Sarah, 238n4
Dewey, John, 167, 171, 178
Donoho, Constantine J. "Con," 8, 9, 10
Durham, Israel, 138, 142

Eaton, Dorman, 69–70, 192
Edwards, Rebecca, 199
ethnicity. *See* race and ethnicity

factions: defined, 7; Know Nothings and, 22; Tweed Ring and, 34, 40. *See also* republicanism
Fadiman, Clifton, 218
Federalist Number 10, ix–x
femininity: machine politics and, 150–153; moral virtue associated with, 120; reform associated with, 37, 201–202; women's activism and, 115–118, 120, 127–129, 133–134
Fink, Leon, 87, 102
fire companies, 4, 10, 11–12, 30, 61–62
Fitzgerald, John, 126–127, 175, 207
Flanagan, Maureen, 125, 211
Flynn, William, 143, 145, 146
Folk, Joseph, 201, 204
Follett, Mary Parker: and deliberative democracy, 167, 179, 183–186, 187, 188, 222, 246n44; on generosity of machines, 155; and neighborhood centers, 130; and social centers, 178, 179; Steffens ignoring work of, 209
Foote, Stephanie, 141, 162
Ford, Paul Leicester, 64, 159–161, 162, 244nn57,61
Fox, Kenneth, 198
Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly Newspaper, 109, *110*
Frederick Douglass House, 168

Gale, Alonzo, 9
gender: labor movement and, 102–103; and liberal reformer coalition attempts, 199–200; machine metaphor and, 68; Steffens and, 201–202; women's activism and assumptions about, 115–118, 120, 127–129, 133–134. *See also* femininity; masculinity

General Federation of Women's Clubs, 127
George, Henry, 87, *88*, 91, 92–94, 96, 97, 98, 100, 101, 102, 104, *106*, 107, 108–110, 112, 113, 144, 162
Gerber, David, 20
German Americans: bosses cultivating, 14; and labor movement, 111; population of, 3–4; and reform movement, 42
Gilmore, Glenda, 124
Godkin, E. L.: biographical information, 44–45, 47, 120; on city as a business, 51; class and, 70; as critic of Tammany, 40, 44, 46, 83–85, 98, 135, 144, 145, 153, 196; and Good Government Clubs, 194; and heterogeneity, 44, 198; influence of, 45, 65, 78; as liberal reformer, 57, 69, 192; and "machine," use of term, 62, 63, 64; and the *Nation*, 45, 57; and pluralism, 47, 82; and suffrage restriction, 44, 45–47, 49, 52–53
Gompers, Samuel, 43, 94, 104, 111, 112
Good Government Association (Boston), 127, 197–198, 206–207, 213–214
Good Government Clubs (New York), 193–194, 196, 199
Gosnell, Harold, 215
government, women's activism and reshaping of, 118, 124–128, 153
Grant, Hugh, 84–85, 113
Grant, Ulysses S., 36, 62–63
Great Upheaval, 87. *See also* labor movement

Hall, Abraham Oakey, 30–31, 33, 37
Handlin, Oscar, 219, 220
Hare, Thomas, 48, 212–213
Harper's, 57; Nast's cartoons, *29*, 30, 32, 36–39, *38*, *39*, 40, 46, 70, 73, *74*
Harrison, Carter, 100, 108, 111
Havermeyer, William, 8, 42–43
Hay, John, 159
Haymarket Square, 90–91, 94, 106
heterogeneity: antebellum period and, 225n4; anti-Tweed movement and denial of, 32, 36, 39; bosses' abandonment of consensus and, 17–18; and centralization of power, 18–19, 25; Civil War and, 26–27; crowd psychology and, 184; and deliberative democracy, 175; development of, 3–4; Godkin and Sterne and, 47, 48–49; Know Nothings and rejection of, 22; machine metaphor and, 76–77; municipal reformers and, 22; women's activism and, 129–131. *See also* pluralism
Hewitt, Abram, 91, 93, 108
Hofstadter, Richard, 5, 219, 220
The Honorable Peter Stirling and What People Thought of Him (Ford), 159–161, 162, 244nn57,61
Howe, Frederic, 178, 202
Hull House, 115, 132, 154, 168, 170–171, 176–177. *See also* Addams, Jane

identities, collective: development of, 4–5, 12; party politics and, 5
Illinois Women's Alliance, 129
immigrants and immigration: bosses and, 16; compassion and identification and, 171–176; kindness and collaboration among, 175–176; Know Nothings and, 21–22; machine politics and social order, 157; overview, 3; and pluralism, need for, 17; region of, xii; republican citizenship and, 22; statistics, 3–4; and suffrage restriction, 45–46. *See also* heterogeneity; nativism; Social Darwinism
individualism. *See* liberalism
industrialization: and boss, as term, 9; and class identification, 4; labor movement and, 87, 95–96; machine metaphor and, 59–61; overview, 3; region of, xii; statistics of, 89; and suffrage restriction, 46
industrializing America: defined as region, xii
Irish Americans and immigrants: bosses cultivating, 14; Orange riot, 32, 34, 40–41; population of, 3–4; and reform movement, 42, 47; representations of, 37, 39, 70–73, *71–72*; *The Last Hurrah* and, 217, 219

Jacobson, Matthew, 70
James, William, 45, 167
J. Devlin, Boss (Williams), 161–162, 163
Jefferson, Thomas, 61
Johnson, Tom, 168, 169, 178, 202, 204
Johnston, Robert, 97
Jones, Henry Ford, 158
Jones, Samuel, 113, 168, 169
journalism and commentary: and liberal reformer coalition attempts, 196, 203–204; and machine metaphor, 62–63, 66, 67, 68, 70, 83–85, 105–107, *106*; and machine politics, 140, 149–150, 155–156, 218–219; and Mugwump influence, 57–58; and municipal reformers, 24; New York as center of, xii; and Tammany Hall, xii, 28; and *The Last Hurrah*, 218; Union Leagues and use of, 26. *See also* muckraking; Steffens, Lincoln

Kelly, Edmond, 193, 194
Kelly, John, xii, 42, *55*, 66, 67, 143, 145, 146–147, 150–151, 152

Kenna, "Hinky Dink," 154
Knights of Labor, 87, 89, 90, 91, 92, 94, 95–96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 107, 108, 111
Know Nothings. *See* American Party

labor movement: bosses and, 14; bosses from, 8–9; democratic principles and, 100–102; gender and, 102–103; industrialism and, 87, 95–96; and liberal reformer attempts at coalition, 192, 194, 195, 197; liberal reformers compared to, 98–99; machine metaphor and, 59–60, 85–86, 104–107, *106*, 221; municipal reformers and, 42, 43; overview, 3; parties, 20–21, 87–88, 89, 91–95, 96, 97, 99, 100, 101–104, 105, *106*, 107–111, *110*, 235n5; pluralism and, 85–86, 89, 95, 112–114; reform as goal of, 95–96, 129; republicanism and, 13, 87–88, 95, 99–100, 103–104, 111–112; socialists and, 90, 111, 113, 129, 235n5; strikes and boycotts, 90–91, 157, 168, 171, 172–173; and suffrage restriction, 29, 52
LaFollette, Robert, 201, 202–203, 204
Laskie, Harold, 184, 215
Lassalle, Ferdinand, 90, 235n5
The Last Hurrah (O'Connor), 217–221
LeBon, Gustave, 184
Leikin, Steven, 101
Leonard, Gerald, 5
Lewis, Alfred Henry, 138, 145, 148–149, 150–151, 157, 161, 162; *The Boss*, 161, 162–163
Lexow Commission, 194–195
liberalism: common good in, 19; defined, 6–7; machine politics and, 139, 140
liberal reformers: and Bryce, 78–79; labor movement compared to, 98–99; leadership and, 57–58, 81–82, 199–200; and machine, as term, 62, 69; masculinity and, 77; as Mugwumps, 57–58; and Ostrogorski, 80; pluralism and, 57–58, 69, 73–78, 80–85; and pluralism, attempts at cooperation across class, 192–200. *See also* machine metaphor; municipal reformers; Social Darwinism
Lippman, Walter, 214–215, 220, 249n30
Lloyd, Henry Demarest, 111
Lomasney, Martin, 128, 138, 142–143, 145, 151, 154, 156, 175
Lowell, James Russell, 57, 61, 65–66
Lowell, Josephine Shaw, 120, 122, 123
Low, Seth, 119, 120, 121

machine metaphor: and boss, as term, 67; business and, 77, 82; and cities, 64–65, 79–80; and civic virtue, 63–64, 66, 77; class and, 56, 60, 65–66, 73, 75–77, 79, 80–81, 82–86; and fire companies, 61–62; gender and, 68; and industrialization, 59–61; journalism and, 62–63, 66, 67, 68, 70, 83–85, 105–107, *106*; labor movement and, 59–60, 85–86, 104–107, *106*, 221; and leadership, 56, 66; as misleading, 65; and morality, 76–77, 81; negative connotations, 58, 59–60, 68–69; overview, 53, 54–58; and pluralism, 57–58, 69, 73–78, 80–85; positive connotations, 58–59, 60, 61, 67–68; race and, 56, 66, 70–73, 80; Social Darwinism and, 56–57, 60, 69–70; as term, 53, 54, 58, 62–63, 69, 231n3; and voters, 66–67
machine politics: academic reinforcement of, 192, 215, 220–221; Jane Addams and, 115, 154–155, 171, 173–174, 177; and biography, importance of, 144–146, 149, 151, 160; as business, 137–138, 142–143; class and, 139, 140–142, 143–147, 153–156, 160–161, 162–163, 221; decline of, 219; defense of, 135–139, 147–148, 153–156, 163–164; ethical rehabilitation of, 219–221; failures of, 221–222; fiction and, 140, 159–163, 217–221; gender and public life, 150–153; and generosity to the poor, 139, 153–156, 173, 174–175, 221–222; and grass roots, 144; journalism and commentary and, 140, 149–150, 155–156, 218–219; liberal reformers using tactics of, 192; masculinity and, 137, 138–139, 148–149, 150–153; military terminology and, 137, 151–152; persistence of, 41–42, 219–220; photographs and, 146–147; Social Darwinism and, 137, 139, 148–150; and social order, preservation of, 16–17, 18–19, 31, 32, 34, 137, 138–139, 156–158, 162–164, 228n37; women's activism and, 128. *See also* bosses; machine metaphor; Tammany Hall
"Machine Politics in New York City" (Roosevelt), 64, 75–78
MacLeod, Xavier Donald, 15–16, 17–18, 19–20
Madison, James, ix, x
Mandelbarum, Seymour, 31
Marx, Leo, 54, 59
masculinity: bosses and, 10–12, 16, 17, 37, 201; and class, representations of, 37; labor movement and, 102–103; and liberal reformer coalition attempts, 199–200; liberal reformers and, 77; machine politics and, 137, 138–139, 148–149, 150–153; overview, 2; Steffens and, 201–202; women's activism and, 115–118, 120, 127–129, 133–134, 150, 152–153. *See also* gender
Mattson, Kevin, 177, 187

McClure's Magazine, 189, 197, 200, 203, 203–204
McClure, S. S., 203–204
McDonald, Terrence, 155–156, 220
McDowell, Mary, 131
McFarland, Gerald, 192
McLaughlin, Hugh, 9
McManes, James, 70
McMullen, William, 8, 9, 11–12, 153
Merriam, Charles, 215
Merton, Robert, 219–220
middle class. *See* business; class
militias, 10
moral consensus: absence of, as controversial, 3; desire for, 2; republicanism and, 6; and Tweed Ring, 32–33. *See also* public, singular
Morgan, Thomas, 167
Morone, James, ix
Morrissey, John, 67, 70, *71*
Mott, Frank Luther, 84
muckraking: Godkin and, 84; waning of, 206. *See also* Steffens, Lincoln
Mugwumps. *See* liberal reformers
Muncy, Robyn, 125
municipal contracts, 31
"municipal housekeeping," 117
Municipal League (Philadelphia), 193, 194, 198, 199
municipal reformers: centralized approach, 191; defense of machine and, 135, 138, 140–141; differences subsumed by, 22, 24–25; formula used by, 23; journalism and, 24; and Know Nothings, 24; overview, 20; rise of, 22–23; and suffrage restriction, 29, 40, 41–42, 43–44, 45–48, 49–52. *See also* liberal reformers; Progressive reform; third-parties
Municipal Voter's League (Chicago), 166, 195–197
Murphy, Charles, 138, 147

Nast, Thomas, *29*, 30, 32, 36–39, *38*, *39*, 40, 46, 70, 73, *74*
Nathan, Maud, 120, 121
Nation: Godkin and, 45, 57; on rings, 33, 36; on Tweed scandal, 47
National Municipal League, 198, 211–213
nativism: anti-immigration and, 157; and desire for moral consensus, 1–2; and identities, development of, 4; and suffrage restriction, 46–47. *See also* American Party
neighborhood centers, 130–131
neighborhoods: development of, 4; social centers and, 185
New Deal, 220
newspapers. *See* journalism and commentary
New York City: industrialization of, 89; neighborhoods of, 4; overview, xii; population of, 3. *See also* Tammany Hall
New York Times, 19, 28, 32, 33–36
North American Review, 57, 135, 147, 148

O'Connor, Edwin, 217–221
Oestreicher, Richard, 112
Orange Riot, 32, 34, 40–41
Ostrogorski, Moisie, 68–69, 80–82

"Paddy's Fight with the Know Nothings" (Robinson), 1–3
Paris Commune, 34, 37, 43
Parkhurst, Ellen, 120
Parkhurst, Rev. Charles, 83, 119, 120, 123, 135, 141, 194–195, 198
parks, 131
participatory democracy. *See* deliberative democracy; social center movement
party politics: antipartyism, 5–6, 20–22, 25–27; and development of pluralism, 5; labor parties, 20–21, 87–88, 89, 91–95, 96, 97, 99, 100, 101–104, 105, *106*, 107–111, *110*, 235n5; Socialist Party, 113; Tweed Ring and, 30–31; women and, 10–11, 150–153. *See also* machine metaphor; machine politics
Penrose, Boies, 119
People's Party, 21, 94, 111
Philadelphia: industrialization of, 89; neighborhoods of, 4, 11–12; population of, 3, 4
Pinderhughes, Diane, 222
Pingree, Hazen, 113, 168–169
Plunkitt, George Washington, 138, 142, 145, 146, 151, 155–156, 157–158
Plunkitt of Tammany Hall (Plunkitt), 155–156, 157–158
pluralism: academic reinforcement of, 191–192, 215, 220–221; as controversial idea, ix–x, 25, 35–36; deep, xi; defined, 5; emergence of, 5; failures of, 221–222; inadvertent promotion of, Progressivists and, 191, 205–211, 216; as incomplete transition, x, 6, 222–223; labor movement and, 85–86, 89, 95, 112–114; liberalism and, 7; liberal reformers and, 57–58, 69, 73–78, 80–85; liberal reformers and attempted approach to, 192–200; and machine metaphor, 57–58, 69, 73–78, 80–85; and machine politics, 140, 220–222; social center movement distinguished from, 184–185; social centers and mindset of, 177–178, 180; Steffens acknowledging, 209; women's activism and, 129–130, 131. *See also* bosses; class; deliberative democracy; race and ethnicity

political science, 215, 219
Powers, Johnny, 115, 133, 154–155, 156, 171, 173–174, 177
Pragmatism, 167–168, 171–172
Process of Government (Bentley), 214, 215
producerism, 13, 14, 97–98, 111
Progress and Poverty (George), 92
Progressive reform: deliberative democracy as trend in, 166–169, 177, 188; democratic impulses, lack of, 192; gender and, 199–200; journalism and, 196, 203–204; liberal reformer attempts at cross-class coalition, 192–200; and pluralism, academic reinforcement of, 191–192, 215; and pluralism, inadvertent promotion of, 191, 205–211, 216; proportional representation, 212–214; rise and fall of, 189, 191, 215–216; and singular public, belief in, 178, 179, 180, 183, 187, 197–200, 211–216. *See also* social center movement; Steffens, Lincoln
property holders: anti-Tweed campaign and, 34, 41; attempts to limit vote to, 29, 44, 50, 51, 52; and liberal reformer coalition attempts, 198
Proportional representation, 42, 48–49, 52, 212–214
public good. *See* common good
public, singular: antipartyism and need for, 5–6; anti-Tweed sentiment and, 28–29, 32, 35–36, 39; bosses and rhetoric of, 19–20; and Civil War era, 25–27; as enduring ideal, ix–x, 223; faith in, and lack of inclusion and deliberation, 222; heterogeneity and abandonment of, 17–18; manufacturing, 49; Progressivism and belief in, 178, 179, 180, 183, 187, 197–200, 211–216; and Tweed, 28–29. *See also* common good; republicanism
Pullman, George, and Pullman strike (1894), 168, 171, 172–173
Purroy, Henry, 84, 144, 145

Quigley, David, 50

race and ethnicity: anti-Tweed campaign and, 34–35, 40–41; and boss, as term, 9; bosses cultivating contacts, 14; and bosses, representation of, 39, 70–73, *71–72*, 150; and failures of machine-style pluralism, 221–222; identity an, d, 4–5; and liberal reformer attempts at coalition, 192, 194, 197; machine metaphor and, 56, 66, 70–73, 80; Nast's representations of, 37–39; race riots, 11–12; social center movement and, 180, 186–187, 188; and suffrage restriction, 46–47; as term in nineteenth century, 226n4; women's activism and cooperation across, 128–129, 131, 168, 170–171
railroads, 31, 51, 59, 90, 157
reciprocity, democracy and, xi, 222
religion: bosses and, 12; identity and, 4–5; Stead's civic church, 165, 166
republicanism: anti-aristocracy, 20; anti-monarchy, 20, 37; antipartyism, 5–6, 20–22, 25–27; bosses and use of themes of, 19–20; and bosses, criticism of, 19; and corruption, definition of, 33; defined, 6; diminished authority of, 56–57; labor movement and, 13, 87–88, 95, 99–100, 103–104, 111–112; leadership and, 6, 8, 56; post–Civil War and, 33; Social Darwinist version of, 43–44, 46–47, 52, 66; suffrage restriction as return to, 50–51; as vocabulary in opposition to faction, 7; and women's roles, 10. *See also* civic virtue; public, singular
Republican Party: antipartyism and, 6; Civil War and, 25–26; Mugwump defection, 57
ring, as term, 32–33, 53, 62
Riordon, William, 138, 155–156
riots: draft, 31; Orange, 32, 34, 40–41; race, 11–12
Robinson, Tom, 1–3
Rodgers, Daniel, x
Roosevelt, Theodore, 64, 75–78, 80, 91, 93, 113, 161, 202, 206
Ryan, Mary, 35, 102, 225n4
Rynders, Isaiah, 8, 9

Schurz, Carl, 62, 63, 64, 78
separate-spheres ideology, 116–117
settlements: club activism and, 127, 132; and cross-class and -race cooperation, 168, 170–171; defined, 117, 170; establishment of, 170; government affected by, 125, 127, 177; imperfections in, 170, 176–177; labor movement and, 113. *See also* women's activism (clubs)
Shapley, Rufus, 64, 70–73, *74*
Shefter, Martin, 65, 144
Silbey, Joel, 5
single transferable vote (STV) method, 212–213
Smith, Al, 128, 222
"The Social Center" (song), 180, 246n34
social center movement, *166*; antecedents, 178–179, 183; civic clubs of, *166*, 180–181, 182; decline of, 181, 186, 188; deliberative process and, 179, 180–182, 184–186, 246n44; gender assumptions and, 180,

185–186, 246n34; goal of, 177–178; imperfections of, 179–180, 186–187; inclusiveness (heterogeneity) and, 178–179, 180, 182, 183–184, 186–188; journalism and, 187; and machine politics, alternative to, 182–183, 186; pluralism distinguished from, 184–185; pluralistic mindset of, 177–178, 180; Progressive reformers ignoring, 202, 212; public policy and, 181–182, 185; schools used for, 178, 179, 182, 183; as urban, 182–183, 185, 187–188
Social Darwinism: Jane Addams and, 174–175, 176; machine metaphor and, 56–57, 60, 69–70; machine politics and, 137, 139, 148–150; race and class and, 70; and reformulated republican vision of civic life, 43–44, 46–47, 52, 66; social centers in opposition to, 185–186; and social science, 69; and status quo, preservation of, 148
socialists: labor movement and, 90, 111, 113, 129, 235n5; liberal reformer coalitions and, 197; social centers accused of being, 186
social order, machine politics and, 16–17, 18–19, 31, 32, 34, 137, 138–139, 156–158, 162–164, 228n37
social science: machine politics and, 75, 215; municipal reform and, 45; pluralism and, 57; rise of, 56–57, 69. *See also* Social Darwinism
Solid for Mulhooly (Shapley), 64, 70–73, *74*
"Song for Mayor Wood," 14–15
Spain, Daphne, 131
special interests, ix–x, 223
Stead, William, 149, 157, 165–166, 195, 198
Steffens, Lincoln: Boston opportunity to practice reform, 206–211; and contradictory interpretations of ideas, 205; and differences, erasure of, 202–203, 209–210; disregard for deliberation, 202, 209–210, 249n30; gender and, 201–202; inclusiveness and, 209; and pluralism, acknowledgment of, 209; and pluralism, inadvertent promotion of, 191, 205–211, 216; rise and fall of influence, 189, 191, 197, 200, 203–205; and singular public, belief in, 191, 200–201, 206, 210–211, 215–216
Sterne, Simon, 40, 44, 48–49, 51, 192, 213
Stokely, William, 70, 143, 145, 150, 152, 157
street gangs, 4, 10, 11
Strong, George Templeton, 4
Strong, William, 119, 151, 194, 195
Suffrage. *See* Voting rights
Sullivan, Tim, 84, 128, 144, 145, 152, 153, 154
Sumner, William Graham, 69, 70
Sweeney, Peter Barr, 30, 33, 37, 39, 68

Tammany Biographies (Godkin), 83–85, 145, 196
Tammany Hall: Godkin and anti-machine movement, 83–85; and immigrants, 157; journalism and, xii, 28; and labor, 113, 222; liberal reformer attempts at coalition and, 193–195; "patriotism" of, 157–158; persistence of, after Tweed, 41–42; rise of, 65, 69–70; and suffrage restriction, 29, 52; Walsh and, 9; women's activism against, 118–121; Wood and, 13–14. *See also* Tweed Ring
Tammany Times, 138, 144–146, 151, 152, 157
Tarkington, Booth, 161
taxes, insurrection of the capitalists, 41
taxpayers. *See* property holders
Teaford, Jon, 67
temperance movement, 16, 124, 180–181
tent meetings, 169, 178, 202
third-parties: American Party, 1–2, 14, 21–22, 24; antipartyism and, 20–22; overview, 20. *See also* labor: parties; municipal reformers
Thompson, Daniel Greenleaf, 143, 158, 215
Tilden Commission, 29, 49–51, 52, 83
Tilden, Samuel J., 8, 30, 49, 52, 64, *71*
Triangle Factory fire, 128, 222
Tweed Ring: corruption of, 28, 30, 31–32, 33–35; County Courthouse, 31; direct aid to the poor, 31; extravagant behavior, 31–32; journalism and commentary on, 30, 32, 33–35, 40–42, 43, 62; and "machine" as term, 62, 68; party politics and, 30–31; patronage, 31; as professional politicians, 31; and "ring" as term, 32–33; social order and, 31, 32, 34; suffrage restriction, anti-Tweed campaign and, 29, 40, 41–42, 43–44, 45–48, 49–52; symbolic gestures, 31
Tweed, William Magear: biographical information, 30, 32; and "boss" as term, 9; corruption of, 28; ethnicity of, 37; name of, 229n1; notoriety of, xii; representations of, 30, 37, 39–40; Social Darwinism in critiques of, 46. *See also* machine metaphor; Tweed Ring

Union Leagues, 25–27
United Improvement Association (UIA), 207–208
United Labor Party (ULP), 94, 96–97, 99, 102, 104, 108–109, 111, 236n28
universal suffrage. *See* voting rights
urbanization: bosses as inevitable, 150; journalism and, 4; liberalism and, 7; region of, xii; statistics, 3–4

Van Buren, Martin, 5, 139
Villard, Oswald Garrison, 123–124

violence: and labor strikes, 90–91, 94, 106. *See also* masculinity; riots
voting rights: literacy tests, 44; proportional representation, 42, 48–49, 52, 212–214; suffrage restriction, anti-Tweed campaign and, 29, 40, 41–42, 43–44, 45–48, 49–52; suffrage restriction, machine metaphor and, 65; woman suffrage, 123–124, 133–134, 176, 186

Walsh, Mike, 8–9
Ward, Edward: and deliberative democracy, 167, 179, 180–183, 186, 187–188, 222; National Municipal League and, 212; pluralistic mindset of, 180; Steffens ignoring work of, 202, 209–210
welfare state, 127, 176, 219
Westhoff, Laura, 168
Whig Party, 5–6, 9, 11, 118–119
White, William Allen, 149–150, 187
Whitlock, Brand, 161, 204
Whitman, Walt, 4, 58
Who Governs? (Dahl), 221
Wilentz, Sean, xi, xii, 3–4, 8–9
Williams, Francis Churchill, 161–162, 163
woman suffrage movement, 123–124, 133–134, 176, 186
women: bosses' paternalistic attitude toward, 17; grass roots and, 10; labor movement and, 102–103; party politics and, 10–11, 150–153; republicanism and, 10; tent meetings and, 169. *See also* gender; women's activism
women's activism (clubs): characteristics defining, 117; cooperation and democratic deliberation as emphasis of, 117, 118, 128–133, 153, 168; diversity, outreach, and inclusiveness, 117, 120–123, 128–133, 168, 238n4; domestication of politics, 118, 124–128, 153; gender assumptions and, 115–118, 120, 127–129, 133–134; machine politics and, 128; pluralism and, 129–130, 131; purification of city politics, 118–124; roles of women and, 123–124, 127–128, 133–134. *See also* settlements; woman suffrage movement
Women's City Club (Chicago), 125, 126, 129–130, 132
Women's Committee of the City Party (Philadelphia), 118–119, 121, 122
Women's League for Good Government, 119, 122
Women's Municipal League (Boston), 126–127, 130–131, 132, 178, 183
Women's Municipal League (New York City), 118–119, 120–121, 122, 123, 152
Women's Permanent Committee for Good Government (Philadelphia), 119, 122
Women's Tammany Club, 152
Wood, Fernando, 7, 12–20, 25, 26, 31, 42, 139, 153
Woods, Robert, 155, 175
working class. *See* bosses; class; labor movement; machine politics
Workingmen's Parties, 21–22

Zeublin, Charles, 178